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SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 422. FOR WEEK ENDING JANUARY 30TH, 1897. [ONE PENNY.

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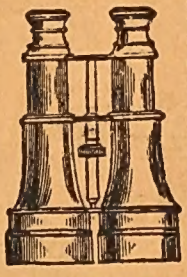

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SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY

C. ARTHUR PEARSON

A FEAST OF FICTION

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No. 422.] [ONE PENNY.

For the Week ending January 30th, 1897.

THE MURDERS AT LITTLE BELTON.

I.

THE actual facts of the Little Belton tragedy were simplicity itself. Bessie Fothergill, the organist of the parish church, was found dead in the organ-loft.

At seven o'clock in the evening there had been the usual choir practice, after which Miss Fothergill had stayed behind for her own private practice. As she did not arrive home by ten o'clock, her brother, Edgar, went in search of her, and, to his horror, found her huddled up on the pedal-board, quite dead.

The body was at once conveyed to the "Queen's Head," and a doctor sent for. There were no external marks of violence, and only when the body was undressed was a small puncture discovered in her back about three inches from the nape of the neck. The village doctor probed this wound, and in a few minutes extracted a hollow steel dagger one tenth of an inch in diameter at its thickest part. The blade had broken off, leaving five inches of steel in the wound, and thus any flow of blood was prevented.

These were the sole particulars communicated to Inspector Dawson on his arrival from the Bradlington Police Office.

If ever there were mysteries on the face of the earth, this was one of them, and the strangest part of the affair was the apparent absence of all motive. The murdered girl had led a quiet, uneventful village life. Music she had learnt principally from her mother, once a celebrated pianist until rheumatism destroyed the *technique* of her touch. The girl had been apprenticed to the late organist, and on his death succeeded to his post and pupils. Lovers she had none, although a

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fairly pretty girl, simply because her thoughts were too much taken up with her profession to admit of a man coming between her and her beloved art.

She had no enemies, because, being poor, she had few friends. No one benefited by her death; on the contrary, she was a loss to the village in many ways, and to her own family in particular. Her father had died in her infancy, her only brother Edgar was an agricultural instructor, and brought but little grist to the family mill. The mother's income was very limited, consequently the deceased girl's earnings were no little help to the household.

On the evening of the murder the door of the church was left wide open by the choir when they left after the practice. The staircase leading to the organ-loft commenced at the porch, and the door at the foot could not be opened from the outside without a key.

There was but one key, and this Miss Fothergill always kept herself, as she was personally responsible to the churchwardens for the good condition of the organ. The schoolmaster, who had been the last to descend the loft steps, affirmed on oath at the inquest that he had shut the door and pushed it to make sure that it was properly closed. "I have daughters of my own," he added, "and I never liked to know that the girl was alone and altogether unprotected in the church."

The Inspector made the customary examinations with stereotyped assumptions of mystery and importance. He went through every possible motive for which the crime could have been committed. But all to no purpose. As well might he have tried to discover what song the sirens sang or what name Achilles assumed when he put on the garb of woman.

The village population was commonplace and prosaic. The majority of the people were farmers or workers in the brickfields and tanneries with which the surrounding country abounded. There were about twenty moneyed families in the place, more or less endowed with this world's goods, and half-a-dozen professional men, but not the slightest suspicion of spicy adventure clung to any single one of them. Humdrum respectability was the dominant note of the place.

When all outward investigation was over, Dawson frankly admitted that the only clue was the broken dagger. It was most new, and of foreign manufacture, the name "Blanchi, Cia., Milano," being embossed round the circular blade. He wired to the police of Milan, inquiring about this firm, but was told in return that no such firm had ever existed in that city. Thus even this solitary link was broken, for, without a doubt, the assassin had taken the precaution of making away with the detached hilt.

In a week Dawson returned to Bradlington, and in less than a month Little Belton itself had ceased to be interested in the tragedy.

II.

SOME months after the death of Bessie Fothergill, Dawson's term of service expired. He had worked long enough in harness and had formed plans of starting life afresh as a private detective. If he could but unravel the Belton mystery, his future was assured. Impelled, then, by no motive of justice or duty, but simply by the wish to advertise himself, he determined to devote all his energy, skill and experience to the discovery of the murderer.

As luck would have it, circumstances so arranged themselves as to give him a facile opportunity of prosecuting his investigation. The post of organist had not yet been permanently filled up, and as Dawson was a fair musician, he offered himself for the vacant post. The salary he asked was merely nominal and his credentials were undeniable, so the churchwardens closed with his offer at once.

Accordingly, six months after the tragedy he was installed as organist and choirmaster of Little Belton church.

His disguise was complete. The long beard was done away with, and his moustache waxed and twirled; this, together with his long, lanky hair gave him the appearance of a veritable virtuoso.

He gave out that he had long lived abroad, studying music and art in the schools of Munich and Dresden. These harmless fictions, coupled with his decidedly foreign appearance, and accentuated, it must be confessed, by his diabolical grimaces and contortions at every discord, more than sufficed to procure him pupils by the dozen; in point of fact, Little Belton soon learnt to pride itself in having a real *mæstre* in its bosom.

It occurs to me, by the way, that I, Dudley Bertram, have hitherto omitted to state that I was the village lawyer, estate agent, and, though but thirty-eight years of age, was the general wiseacre to the village. In the course of my practice I had been to Bradlington times without number, and therefore knew Dawson quite well. Accordingly, at our second meeting I charged him with his identity, and he laughingly acknowledged it, confessing his motives for the masquerade. Naturally I, as a man of law, volunteered him every assistance in my power.

Many a talk we had over the crime. Sometimes he fancied he was on the scent of the murderer, and then was as gay as a schoolboy; but as each succeeding fancied clue turned out to be a mare's nest, depression seemed slowly to master him.

As legal adviser to the whole community, I was intimately acquainted with the history of every family in the place, which information I confided to Dawson. We turned over in our minds every single person, and not a soul escaped our careful exhaustive analysis. But nothing came of it.

One afternoon I was sitting in my private office, lazily looking over the *Law Times*, when my clerk announced Mr. Wortley, for by this name was Dawson known in Little Bolton.

"Mr. Dudley," he said excitedly, "I have a clue at last. Look what I have found."

So saying, he held up delightedly a piece of torn paper, nearly two inches square. It was apparently the top left corner of an ordinary sheet of note-paper, and these letters were plainly decipherable: "This is t . . . condemne . . . may pre . . . as noth . . ."

Dawson, with his excited imagination, easily filled up the rest of the missive, which, he confidently asserted, was a warning to the girl from someone who knew that her death was resolved upon. I agreed that his suggestion was plausible, and wished him every success.

"What do you intend doing now?" I asked, as he tenderly placed the scrap of paper in his pocket-book.

"My next move is at once to get leave of absence from the churchwardens for a week or two. Meanwhile, I will have the writing examined by an expert, and compared with the caligraphy of every adult in the place. It is my firm opinion that the writing, although angular and feminine, is that of a man. Look," he added, "the pen has been almost pushed through the paper. Some exertion has been required to write that

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letter, and in all probability the hand is disguised, for no man ploughs up paper in that fashion in his natural handwriting."

So saying, he left me for the church, for the day was Friday and he was almost due for the choir practice.

Poor Dawson! His to-morrow never came. That night he was found dead at the organ. A coil of copper wire was twisted round his neck and the poor wretch had been literally garotted.

On hearing the news I rushed at once to see the body. He had been already searched, his book was there, but the scrap of paper was gone!

III.

A MONTH after the panic caused by Dawson's tragic end, things went on pretty much as before in Little Belton. The little town had acquired a somewhat unenviable notoriety, but this was good for business and no one grumbled.

The Press throughout the land had affected the customary indignation and surprise. The police were blamed for remissness, the church authorities for negligence, and a stigma of possible criminality rested upon every able-bodied creature in the town.

A public meeting was held at the schools, resolutions were passed and—the matter ended there!

Certainly no sane man in Little Belton, with the awful fate of Dawson before his eyes, would care to interfere in things that did not personally concern him.

The pseudo-organist's late lodgings were soon occupied by strangers. A man and his wife, both evidently about thirty-five years of age, had taken the rooms.

In little more than a week this worthy couple had earned for themselves the execration of every right-minded inhabitant. The wife, Mrs. Harcourt, was a flashy, noisy little woman, while Harcourt himself was unmistakably "horsey"—an unpardonable sin in our latitudes. Despite the real or supposed vigilance of post-office officials it soon eked out that he was a betting man. Dozens of racing wires were delivered at 47, High Street in a week; consequently everybody treated the Harcourts with the silent contempt they were supposed to merit.

Harcourt called on me several times on business matters, generally requesting me to apply for money won over betting transactions. As we met purely on a professional footing there was nothing singular in my avoiding him as much as possible outside my office.

From the very beginning I could not bear the man. There was something in his looks which made me suspect that he had profounder thoughts than betting necessitated. More than once I caught him observing me closely from behind his paper in the station waiting-room. Was it possible, I asked myself, that he knew anything of the conversation that took place between Dawson and myself concerning that mysterious scrap of a letter?

My suspicions were fated to be speedily verified. One morning I received a wire summoning me to Bradlington to see an old client who was in trouble. He kept a large public house just outside the town, and was now summoned for allowing his premises to be used for betting purposes. I went up by the first available train. It would not be true to say that I was taken aback on entering the private bar to see Harcourt there quietly sipping a glass of bitter. On the contrary, the house was exactly the sort of place where he was most likely to be found. The moment he saw me he came forward, and, laying a heavy hand upon my shoulder, quietly said: "Dudley Bertram, I arrest you for the murder of Elizabeth Fothergill and George Dawson."

What I said or did, I know not. It matters little. I am to be hanged to-morrow—the sooner the better. All the world knows now that I am the murderer. At my trial I neither denied nor admitted my guilt, and consequently until the present moment I have carefully concealed the motives which urged me to the commission of these dreadful crimes. Dying, I burn a grain of incense to popular curiosity and give my story to the world.

Years ago, when a student at the Roman University, I joined a powerful secret society called the Giurati. On my return to England, bitterly did I repent my folly in so doing. Many a piece of dirty work have I been forced to perform for that gang of fiends. It is now nearly two years since I received the order to assassinate Bessie Fothergill. Against the poor girl the society had no grudge, but against her mother the villains had vowed implacable revenge. The father, it seems, had been a high official of the League, and in his dying delirium had revealed deadly secrets anent the plans of his associates. The mother, a shrewd, grasping woman, seized the situation at once, and made capital out of her information by selling these secrets to the Court of Austria. Her revelations brought nine men to the scaffold. Revenge at the hands of the Giurati is certain, if not always swift. They are too wise in their generation to resort at once to the assassination of their victim, for they know that death is, alas! too often no punishment at all. They determined to wait until Bessie was the main support of the home, and the joy of her mother's life. The murder of the daughter was to be the punishment of the mother. As is well known, Mrs. Fothergill became hopelessly insane on the night of the murder.

I murdered the girl, broke off the dagger, and in my terrified haste dropped the hilt into the pedal-board of the organ. There it was found by Dawson, and forwarded to headquarters.

After the discovery of my letter of warning, I knew that sooner or later I should be tracked down, and the murder of Dawson was planned at once. Slowly and gently dragging myself up the loft stairs I rushed upon him as he sat dreamily fingering the key-board, and twisting the wire around his neck rocked his body backward and forward until he breathed no more. I then searched for the scrap of paper—but it was gone!

Harcourt and his wife were private detectives who had been in the village since the murder, and I never knew it. The man palmed himself off as a traveller for various novelty companies, and so visited every house in the place, whilst his wife was at first disguised as a barmaid at the "Queen's Arms." Dawson knew them well, and they worked in conjunction. Before going to the church on the evening of his death he had given the fragment of letter into Harcourt's keeping. It was the handwriting expert's testimony that sealed my fate. From that day forward I was watched night and day, and Harcourt only deferred my arrest in the hope of discovering my motives for the crime. At my trial I maintained a stoic silence, solely in the vain hope of escaping the gallows on a plea of insanity.

And now I hear the procession being formed in the courtyard outside my cell. By straining my neck at the window I can see the cross-bar.

Ah! they are coming for me.

H. F. RUSSELL.

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BUTTERCUP.

THERE was once a young Doctor, who, in spite of his youth, was so wise and learned, that the seven wise men of Greece, had they entered into a disputation with him during a visit to the upper world, would have stood before him like school boys.

This Doctor had gone out one morning early in spring into the open air, in order to hear the grass grow, for he also understood this, and as he wandered amid the light green of May and saw the many coloured marvels of the air, the butterflies flying about the star flowers, and heard how the crickets in the grass, the birds in the branches, and the frogs in the meadow brook sang their wedding songs, then he thought of his native village that he had left years ago in order to attend the university, and thought also of the small, black-eyed girl, who had given him a heart of ginger-bread as a farewell present and at the same time shed bitter tears, and he felt curious about it.

On the following day the Doctor packed his bundle, took his knotted stick in his hand, and walked out through the door, bearing joy and pleasure in his heart.

After three days he beheld behind the blooming fruit trees the blue slate roof of his native church tower, and the wind bore to him the mellow pealing of bells.

"The question is whether she will know me," said he to himself. "Scarcely, and I also will have trouble to find again the small Greta in an eighteen-year-old girl.

"But her eyes, her great coal-black eyes, they will betray her to me, and if I see her sitting before her door, on the stone bench, then will I step close up to her—and the rest will come of itself."

The Doctor threw his hat into the air and gave so loud a shout that he was frightened at his own voice. He looked anxiously round to see if anyone had witnessed his outburst, but—besides a field mouse, which fled hastily to its hole, nothing living was near.

With high beating heart, the scholar entered the village. The pealing of the bells was stilled, but instead could be heard the merrier fiddle and sound of flutes. A bridal procession moved through the narrow village streets.

The bridegroom, a young, portly peasant, appeared happy and proud; the bride, adorned with a glittering bridal crown, had cast her eyes modestly to the ground. But once she raised the lids, and the eyes, the great coal-black eyes, betrayed to the Doctor the girl who stepped beneath the bridal crown. And he, the unfortunate, turned and went back unrecognised upon the way he had come.

It was noon. Golden green gleamed the field, and where water flowed there had the sun strewn over it thousands and thousands of glistening rays. Light is pleasant, but that day it caused the Doctor pain, and, therefore, he shaded his eyes with his hand. So he stepped forward, and it pleased the traveller, who had already gone a long distance, when he looked upon a dust cloud moving towards him.

"Good friend," said the stranger, addressing the Doctor, "the sunlight blinds you. Is it not so?"

The Doctor assented to this.

"See," said the other, "there is no better remedy than grey spectacles, like the ones I wear. Try them," and with these words he took his spectacles from his nose and handed them over to the Doctor, who yielded to the man and put on the dark-coloured glasses. They really benefited his eyes. The sun lost its bright glare, the meadow with its red and yellow blooms, the trees, bushes and canopy of the heavens, all were grey, and the Doctor was pleased at this.

"Are the spectacles for sale?" asked he of the strange traveller.

"They are in good hands," returned he, "and I always carry several such spectacles with me. Take them as a keepsake, Herr Doctor."

"Ah! so you know me? And may I ask——"

"Who I am," interrupted the stranger. "My name is Growler. Farewell." With these words he struck into the field path and soon disappeared. But the Doctor pressed the grey spectacles fast upon his nose, and moved along.

Since this occurrence years had passed. The Doctor had become a crusty old bachelor and had forgotten to enjoy the world. He still went out into the open air, but the green of the trees and the magnificent colour of the flowers were no more in existence for him. He pulled up the plants and dried them. Then he laid the flower mummies between grey blotting paper, wrote beneath them a Latin name, and that was his greatest pleasure, if it could be called a pleasure.

Once in his excursions the Doctor came upon an out-of-the-way valley, in which flowed a brook that turned a mill. And as he was thirsty, he asked an old woman, who sunned herself before the door, if he could by chance have a drink. The old woman assented to this, bade the guest be seated, and went into the house. Not long after, a young maiden brought milk and bread, and placed both before the guest on the stone table.

Then it occurred to the Doctor that the maiden was not ugly, but on account of his grey spectacles he could not be positive, and he did not like to take them off, for he knew the sunlight caused his eyes to pain. Silently he partook of what was offered him, and then, as the miller's daughter would not take payment, he pressed her hand and left. But she looked after the melancholy man until he disappeared behind the thicket.

The meadow valley, in which the mill was situated, no doubt must have harboured many kinds of rare plants, for the learned Doctor returned again three days after his first visit and also called again at the mill. And he came yet more frequently, and was soon a welcome guest.

To the old grandmother he brought sugar, coffee and other practical gifts, and he entertained the miller with instructive conversation. To the blonde little daughter he directed never a word, but contented himself by once in a while looking at the fair one through the

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grey glasses, then the grandmother would gently nudge the miller and nod her head knowingly.

One day, after the Doctor had left the mill and gone along the ridge of the valley, he noticed a mole fastened in a mole-trap, which endeavoured by struggling to escape death from strangulation. The kind-hearted man approached, loosed the prisoner, and set him on the earth, after which the Doctor and the mole each went his way.

On the evening of the same day, as the scholar sat in his study, it so happened that a bat came flying in through the open window. It seemed very wonderful, for on the bat rode a little man not taller than a finger, and the little man dismounted and bowed low before the Doctor.

"What seekest thou here?" said he to the little one, not very affably. "Go to the fable writer and disturb not sensible people in their work."

But the little man would not be dismissed; he came nearer, sat down upon the sand-box and spoke:

"Am I not known to thee? I intend thee good, for to-day thou hast released me from a trying situation. I am the mole that thou released from the trap."

"Indeed! And who art thou really?" asked the scholar, and surveyed the little man through his spectacles. He was of small, dainty stature, and had the glasses not been grey, the Doctor would have noticed that the little one wore a green coat and a golden yellow cap.

"I am the meadow sprite, Buttercup," said the dwarf. "My servants attend the grass and herbs. One washes them with dew, another combs them with the sun's rays, and again another furnishes nourishment to the roots. The last named I was watching this morning, and in order not to be recognised, I took on the form of a mole. While in this form I fell into the trap from which thy hand freed, and now I am here to thank thee, and to offer thee a service in return."

"Well, let me hear it," said the Doctor.

"Thou art a learned man," continued the Buttercup. "Thou art acquainted with flowers and plants that grow in valleys and upon the mountains, in the forest and fields; but one flower thou knowest not."

"What one?" asked the learned man, interested.

"That is the flower they call heart's joy."

"No, this one I know not."

"But I do," said Buttercup, "and I will tell thee where thou mayest find it. If thou wilt go up to the source of the mill brook, which thou knowest, until thou comest to a rock, there thou wilt find a cave, which the people call the goblin's cavern. Before the entrance blooms the flower, heart's joy, but only on Trinity Sunday, at the hour of sunrise, and who then is at the place can pluck the flower. Hast thou understood all?"

"Perfectly."

"Then, farewell," said the little man, and then bestrode his flying steed, and flew out through the open window.

The Doctor, astonished, rubbed his forehead and shook his head. Then he buried himself in a volume which was bound in pigskin.

A couple of days after this event the beautiful miller's daughter sat at evening before the meadow mill, and near by her the grandmother. The spinning wheels whirred and the old woman told of Frau Berchta, the White Lady, who gave industrious spinners knots of flax, which afterwards changed into yellow gold, and of many more marvellous things. Also she told of the sleeping man who sat in the goblin's cave. Once in a hundred years he became visible, and if a maiden kissed the sleeping man three times, then was he released, and in reward became the maiden's own sweetheart. So the old woman related and the beautiful maiden listened and spun out the tale like the thread of flax which her white fingers twisted.

In heaven the stars appeared, and as it was the time when the elder blossoms droop, the eyes of the maiden were overcome with sweet weariness. She sought her chamber and went to rest.

In the night there appeared to her a little man who wore a green robe and yellow cap; and the little one seemed very friendly and said to the maiden:

"Thou lucky child: To thee and to no other is the sweetheart in the goblin's cavern allotted. This morning the sleeping man becomes visible; at sunrise he sits slumbering at the entrance of the cave, and if thou art not afraid to kiss him heartily three times upon the mouth, then hast thou broken the spell and won a sweetheart. But take great heed during the work of deliverance to speak no word nor make a sound, for otherwise the sleeping man will sink three thousand fathoms into the earth and must wait again a hundred years for his deliverance."

So spoke the wight and disappeared. But the maiden awoke from her sleep and rubbed her eyes. A sweet scent as of new-mown hay filled the chamber, and through a crack in the window shutter the grey morning appeared. Then the courageous maiden arose and dressed. She softly left the chamber and walked with tucked-up gown through the dewy grass towards the goblin's cavern.

In the branches the forest birds already stirred, and, half asleep, tuned their throats. The white mist sank to the earth and lay in streaks over the meadow, and the tops of the pines were coloured yellow. Then the beautiful miller's daughter stood at the entrance of the cavern, and there sat on a moss-covered stone a sleeping man, just as the little dwarf had previously predicted. The maiden came near and almost gave a loud cry when she saw the sleeping man so closely resembled the Doctor, for he even wore grey spectacles.

But the maiden fortunately remembered the warning of the dwarf and silently, but with heart beating high, drew near the sleeper in order to perform the pious and innocent work of deliverance; and it seemed to her not to be so distasteful as she had previously thought.

Softly she bent over the sleeping one and kissed him on the mouth. The man made a motion as if he would awaken.

The maiden kissed him the second time. Then the man opened his tired eyelids and looked at the maiden, who appeared ghost-like through the grey glasses.

But she remained steadfast and pressed the third kiss on his lips. This caused the awakened one to start up in such haste that the spectacles slid off his nose and broke into splinters on the stony ground. And he saw again, after a long period, the sunny verdure of spring, gay-coloured flowers and the blue heavens, and in the midst of all the splendour, a maiden beautiful as a May rose and slender as a lily. And he embraced her and gave her back the three kisses.

On a golden butterfly sat the meadow sprite, Buttercup, and kicked his little legs for joy. Then down he jumped, so that the flower shook violently, and went about his important occupation.

He had kept his word; the Doctor had found his heart's joy and the beautiful miller's daughter her sweetheart.

JANET STOYLE.

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I.

"WILL monsieur the *sous-directeur* see Madame Blouet?" the clerk asked, opening the door of his chief's office. The *sous-directeur's* room was a large and lofty apartment, official in its furniture and appointments. Its two windows were draped with heavy, green damask curtains, the wall-paper and upholstery were of the same colour; the highly-polished floor reflected the severely simple furniture, and there was a black marble clock flanked by bronzes on the mantel-shelf. With his back to the fire, the *sous-directeur*, Hubert Boinville, was working at a mahogany desk covered with papers and official-looking documents. He raised his grave, melancholy-looking face, with its dark eyes and beard streaked here and there with grey, and looked at the card which the clerk held out to him. "The Widow Blouet" was written there in an old and feeble hand. The name conveyed nothing to him; he tossed the card aside.

Working at a mahogany desk.

"Show her in," he said resignedly. The clerk disappeared, and returned in a moment, introducing the visitor, who paused in the doorway to drop an old-fashioned curtesy.

Hubert Boinville half-rose from his seat and with a cold, polite gesture pointed an armchair to the stranger. She sat down, bowing her thanks.

She was a little, frail old woman, clad in neat but shabby black. The merino gown had been turned more than once; greenish shadows lay in its folds. A veil of rusty crêpe which had clearly done duty in more than one period of mourning hung limply from a bonnet of ancient shape and framed a round, plump face, ruddy, and wrinkled, like a winter apple. Her eyes were black and bright; her compressed lips showed the absence of many teeth.

"Sir," she began, a little breathlessly, "I am the daughter, widow and sister of Government officials who were good and loyal servants to the State, and I have addressed a petition for assistance to the Director of this department—I should like to know whether I may venture to hope that it will be granted."

The *sous-directeur* listened to these preliminaries impassively, he had heard so many of these appeals.

"Have you been helped before?" he asked phlegmatically.

"No, sir, up to the present I have managed to live without assistance—I have a small pension and——"

"Ah!" he interrupted drily. "In that case I fear we can do nothing for you. We have to help so many persons who have not the resource of even a small pension."

"Listen a moment, sir," she said desperately. "I have not told you all—I had three sons; they are dead. The last gave lessons in mathematics. Last winter, in going from the Pantheon to the Chaptal College in the pouring rain he caught a cold which turned to congestion of the lungs and carried him off in a fortnight. His lessons had enabled us to live, his daughter and me. The expenses of his illness and of his funeral drained my resources—I have been compelled to raise money upon my pension in order to meet the most pressing debts, and I am left with my grand-daughter to face starvation—at eighty-two. It is a great age, sir——"

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Her eyes, beneath their wrinkled lids, had filled with tears.

The *directeur* had listened attentively to her story. The sing-song intonation and, here and there, a provincialism had struck his ears like once familiar music. The homely idioms had a flavour which he seemed to recognise and which gave him a singular sensation. He rang and asked for the papers in the case, and, when the clerk had placed them before him, he examined them with evident interest.

"You are a native of Lorraine?" he asked, less coldly.

"Yes, sir, from Argonne—you recognised my accent? I thought I had lost it after living so long in other parts of the country."

The *directeur* looked with growing pity at the old woman whom some rude wind had torn from her native soil, and finally thrown, after many wanderings up and down the arid paths of official life, into the great, heartless city. Little by little his reserve gave way; he almost smiled as he said:

"I also am a native of Lorraine, and I lived for a long time at Clermont, near your village. Take courage, madame; I trust that we shall be able to obtain the help you ask for. You have given your address?"

"Yes, sir; 12, Rue de la Santé, near the Convent of the Capucines. Very many thanks. Your kindness is a great comfort to me, and I am glad, too, to have found a compatriot," and the woman retired with many bows and humble reverences.

Boinville rose and went to one of the windows looking upon the garden which lay behind the office. It was not the great, leafless chestnuts, however, that he gazed at so intently; his eyes were fixed on things much more distant. Far away there to the east, beyond the chalky hills and plains of Champagne, he saw a valley bordering a great forest. A modest little river flowed through it, bathing with its yellow waters the walls of an old town.

It was there that he had lived as a child; thither he had returned for his holidays. There his father, registrar of the local court, had led the narrow life of the official who has only his salary to live upon. Strictly brought up, accustomed from his earliest years to a stern conception of duty and to hard work, he had left his native place when he was twenty, and had only once returned—to his father's funeral. Gifted with ability and an indomitable will, with a giant's capacity for work, he had rapidly climbed the official ladder, until, at the age of thirty-eight, he was *sous-directeur* of his department of the ministry—a very young man, his fellow-officials thought, for such an important post.

Austere and punctual, a martinet in matters of official routine, he reached his office each morning at ten, and remained until six, often taking work home with him. Naturally reserved—the instinctive self-defence of a sensitive temperament, he was looked upon as the type of the coldly correct *bureaucrat*. He went little into society, and his life had always been so busy that he had never had time to think even of marriage. His heart had, however, spoken once, when he was a youth of twenty, but as he was then in a very subordinate position, and without fortune, the girl he loved had repelled his advances, and had married someone else. This early disappointment had left a trace of melancholy which the success of his career had never quite effaced, and that evening the widow's story of her distress, told in the accent and dialect of his birthplace—that accent which one never forgets—brought home to him the loneliness of his life more vividly than he had ever realised it before.

Leaning against the window he turned over, as one stirs a heap of dead leaves, the recollections of his childhood, and the perfume of those happy years so long passed seemed to fill his whole being.

He returned to his desk and, taking the widow's papers, endorsed upon the margin:

"A worthy case. Petition granted"—then he rang and sent the packet to the chief clerk.

II.

ON the day that the grant received the sanction of the Minister, Hubert Boinville left the office rather earlier than usual. It had occurred to him that he would himself carry the news to Madame Blouet.

He found himself in a large garden.

Three hundred francs was a mere drop in the bucket of the ministerial budget, but in the widow's home it would become a fertilising shower. Although it was the beginning of December the weather was mild, and Boinville traversed the distance between his office and the Rue de la Santé on foot. It was growing dark when he reached his destination. By the aid of a gas-lamp he deciphered the number 12 over a door sunk in a long wall of rough masonry, and, pushing the door open, he found himself in a large garden. Two or three lights were shining through the trees, and he made his way towards them, meeting the gardener, who guided him to the widow's little house.

He knocked at the door, which was soon opened by a young girl of apparently some twenty years of age, who looked at the visitor with wide-open eyes.

She wore a black dress, and the lamp she held showed the golden lights of her waving brown hair, her rosy, dimpled cheeks, and clear blue eyes.

"Have I made a mistake?" Boinville murmured; "does Madame Blouet live here?"

"Yes, sir, please come in. Grandmother, a gentleman wishes to see you."

"I am coming," a shrill voice in an adjacent room cried—and a moment later the old dame appeared, untying her blue linen apron as she came.

"*Sainte Mère!*" she exclaimed, "is it you, sir? Pray excuse me—I did not expect the honour of a visit from

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you—Claudette, offer the arm-chair to monsieur—she is my grand-daughter, all I have left, sir."

Boinville sat down in an old, carved chair, covered with faded velvet, and, with a rapid glance, examined his surroundings. The room seemed to serve as parlour and dining-room combined. The furniture was meagre; a small stove in white *faïence* on a slab of red marble; on one side a large oaken cupboard; in the centre a round table, rush-bottomed chairs, and on the walls two or three engravings; the whole was singularly neat in its old-fashioned rusticity. He explained shortly the object of his visit.

"Ah! many, many thanks! my monsieur," the widow cried. "They may well say that 'it never rains but it pours.' Just think! the little one has passed the examination for a situation in the telegraphs, and while she is waiting for an appointment she has been doing some illuminating. To-day she has been paid for a large order she has executed, and we are going to celebrate the Feast of St. Nicholas, just as in the good old days. You remember the St. Nicholas, sir?"

"But, grandmother," the girl interrupted laughingly, "monsieur does not know what the St. Nicholas means. They take no notice of it in Paris."

"He knows very well, all the same. He comes from our own province, from Clermont."

"The St. Nicholas? Of course, I remember," the *sous-directeur* said, his sad face breaking into a smile; "to-day is the sixth of December."

The Saint's name had kindled a host of memories

"No, grandmother," the girl murmured, "it would be an impertinence."

which were flashing through his mind. He saw the great stone fireplace in the home of his childhood, decorated for the festival; he heard the seductive music of the fiddlers as they marched through the streets of the town gathering the lads and lasses together for the annual ball; he remembered how, in the early dawn, he would creep out of bed and run downstairs to the hearth to seize the *sabots* full of the toys the Saint had brought when he came down the great chimney riding on his white ass.

"So this evening," the old woman continued, "we are going to have all the old-fashioned dishes for supper. The gardener has given us cabbages and potatoes for a good *potée*; I have bought a Lorraine sausage, and when you came I was making preparations for the *tôt-fait*."

"Ah! the *tôt-fait!*" Boinville cried; "it is nearly twenty years since I heard it mentioned, the cake of eggs and milk and flour; how good it used to taste!".

As he sat, smiling at his recollections of the old-fashioned country dishes, the old woman drew her grand-daughter aside and seemed to be discussing some grave project.

"No, grandmother," the girl murmured; "it would be an impertinence."

"Why? I am sure it would please him," and as Boinville looked at them inquiringly she turned and said:

"You have already been very kind to us, monsieur; but I have one more favour to ask. It is growing late and you have a long way to go before you can dine—we should be much honoured if you would stay and taste our *tôt-fait*—should we not, Claudette?"

"Yes, grandmother, but monsieur would dine but poorly, and besides he is probably expected at home."

"No, no one expects me," Boinville replied, thinking of the restaurant where he generally ate his solitary meal; "I have no engagement, but——"

He hesitated, looking into Claudette's laughing eyes, then, with a cordiality he seldom displayed, he added:

"I accept, without ceremony, and with much pleasure."

"Ah! that is right!" the widow exclaimed gaily. "What did I tell you, Claudette? Lay the cloth and fetch the wine, while I see to the kitchen."

The girl had already opened the great carved press, bringing out a chequered table cloth and napkins. In a few moments the table was spread, and, taking a *carafe*, she left the room.

"She is a great comfort to me," Madame Blouet said; "she is so bright and cheerful. It will be but a poor meal for you, monsieur, but it is offered freely, and then it will remind you of old times, will it not?"

When the meal had come to an end, Claudette cleared the table, and her grandmother took up her knitting and sat near the stove. Soon, however, soothed by the warmth of the room, she dozed over her work. Hubert and the young girl thus found themselves practically alone, and Claudette bore the main burden of the conversation.

She, too, had passed her childhood at Argonne, living with an aunt; and she recalled many local stories and traditions with an exactness which almost made Boinville believe himself at home once more. The room was very warm, and Claudette had half-opened one of the windows, through which the breeze brought the scent of the garden below where the splash of a small fountain made itself heard as its waters lapped the sides of their stone basin. The convent-bell slowly tolled the *Angelus*

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Hubert Boinville lost himself in a waking dream. He seemed to be twenty years younger, to be transported to some rustic cottage near his early home.

His youth, so long buried beneath huge masses of official documents, revived once more, and Claudette's blue eyes seemed to open a whole world of delicious, undreamt-of possibilities to his weary soul.

The old dame woke with a start, murmuring an apology for having "just closed her eyes for a moment."

Boinville rose, it was time to take his leave. Warmly thanking Madame Blouet, who exacted a promise that he would return, he took Claudette's hand. Their eyes met for a moment ere hers were lowered in confusion. She conducted him to the door, and on the threshold he pressed her hand once more, without, however, finding anything to say.

Nevertheless his heart was full, and when he was in the deserted street the air seemed filled with the music of the violins he had so often heard as a child on St. Nicholas' Eve.

The *sous-directeur* entered with renewed vigour into his official duties. Sittings of the council, interviews, reports, left him no time to pay another visit to the Rue de la Santé. The recollection of that eve of St. Nicholas, however, often recurred to him in the midst of his work, and more than once he had found his attention distracted by the remembrance of Claudette's blue eyes.

They seemed to flit like delicate butterflies over his documents, to shine in laughing mockery from the glowing embers in the grate, to bear him company in his gloomy bachelor's quarters. Sometimes he looked at his beard, already turning grey, and thought of his loveless life, and of his years, and wondered, like the old fellow in La Fontaine's fable, "whether he had passed the age of Love."

One day—it was a gloomy afternoon towards the end of December—his clerk opened the door of his office.

"Madame Blouet!" he announced. Boinville rose eagerly to receive his visitor. When she was seated, he asked after her grand-daughter, flushing as he spoke.

"She is quite well, thank you, your visit brought us good luck, monsieur. She has been waiting for a long time for a vacant appointment in the telegraph service, and yesterday it came. I did not wish to leave Paris without taking leave of you, and assuring you once more of our gratitude."

Boinville's heart beat fast.

"You are leaving Paris?" he asked; "the situation is in the provinces?"

"Yes, in the Vosges, and I, of course, go with Claudette. I am eighty-two, my dear sir, and cannot have much more time to spend with her, and we do not wish to be separated."

"And you are leaving soon?"

"The first week in January. Adieu, monsieur; you have been very, very good to us—Claudette asked me to thank you for her, too."

The *directeur* seemed absorbed; he hardly answered save in monosyllables. When the old dame had gone, he sat for a long time, his elbows on his desk, his face covered with his hands. He slept badly that night, and the next day his clerks found him exacting and hard to please. At three o'clock he left the Ministry and half-an-hour later he rang Madame Blouet's bell. Claudette came to the door. She started and blushed when she saw him, but there was a glad smile in her eyes.

"Grandmother has gone out," she said, "but she will not be long, and will be very pleased to see you."

"It is not Madame Blouet but you whom I wish to see, mademoiselle."

"I?" she murmured, confused.

"Yes, you," he said brusquely. His throat was parched, he could not find the words he wished to speak. "You still intend to leave next month?"

She answered by a nod.

"Are you not sorry to be leaving Paris?"

"Yes, very; but we must go. It is such a fortunate

"Do you find me too old?"

opening for us, and grandmother will be able to spend her last years in peace and comfort."

"And if I were to offer you a means of staying here and still making Madame Blouet happy?"

"Oh! monsieur!" she exclaimed.

"It is a heroic step," he added. "And perhaps you would find the task too great."

"I am brave—but tell me."

He paused a moment to take breath, and then quickly, roughly almost, he blurted out:

"Will you marry me?"

Her face expressed only surprise, not fear. Her lips remained half-opened, but a tender light came into her eyes.

Boinville dared not look at her lest he should read refusal in her glance. At length, alarmed at her silence, he asked:

"Do you find me too old that you seem so startled?"

"Startled?" she asked frankly. "No, but agitated, and—and—content! I dare not believe it yet!"

"Dear child!" he cried, taking her hands, "try to believe it, and believe, too, that it is I who am content, because I love you!"

She said nothing, but her eyes spoke so elegantly that he could not mistake their meaning. They told him that she also was happy, and he drew her closer to him. She suffered him to do so, and growing bolder, he raised her hands to his lips.

"Holy mother!" Madame Blouet exclaimed, as she came up the steps, and caught sight of the lovers.

They turned toward her, he a little confused, she blushingly radiant.

"Madame Blouet," Hubert said gaily, after a momentary pause. "That night I dined with you Saint Nicholas came down the chimney and brought me a present, just as he used to do when I was a child—a wife! This is her—your grand-daughter!"

ANDRÉ THEURIET.

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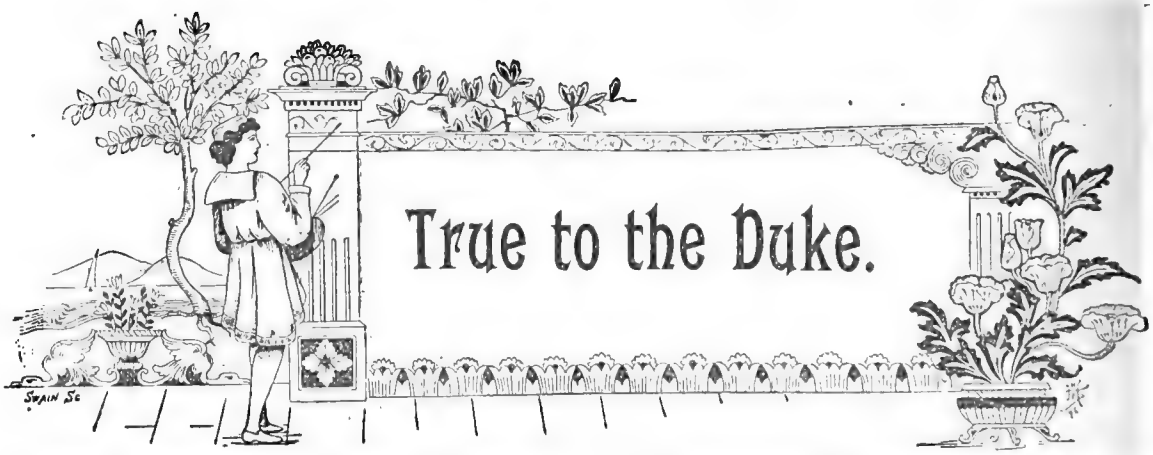

True to the Duke.

THE warm summer sunlight that sifted through the leaves of the sturdy English oaks in Somerset Wood one day fell upon a boy lying at full length on the mossy ground.

He was a stout, good-looking lad, with fair features and chestnut-coloured locks, inclined to curl. Beside him lay a cross-bow with a feathered shaft in the groove, and the boy's hand could have picked up the weapon at a moment's notice.

For some time he had been watching the gambols of two squirrels just beyond bowshot, and in hopes that they might come a trifle nearer and give him a chance to bring one down.

The spot occupied by the young marksman, whose name was Perry Preston, was the summit of a gentle rise which commanded a fair view of the surrounding forest.

While Master Preston lay there he thought of the great battle fought a few days previous at Sedgemoor between King James' men and the rebellious Duke of Monmouth, then a fugitive, with a kingly price upon his head.

The boy had heard of the battle; indeed his uncle, a Mendip miner, had fought there for the lost cause, and at that very moment was hiding somewhere out of reach of the king's hunters.

No one seemed to know where Monmouth was, and the king's soldiers were scouring the countryside for him.

In a short time it would be night, and the gleams of sunlight, which lit up the forest, would give way to shadows.

Presently the boy put out his hand and picked up the cross-bow; but all the time he kept looking at the squirrels.

One of the little animals had frisked to within bowshot, and Master Preston did not want the game to escape.

The boy quietly raised himself upon one knee and took deliberate aim at the squirrel, then liberated the bow-string and watched the arrow in its flight.

The shaft went true to its mark, for the squirrel tumbled from the log, upon which it had perched itself, and Master Preston, with an exclamation of triumph, ran forward.

The further side of the log was well banked up with leaves and into these the game had fallen.

When the little marksman reached the log he looked over and then drew back.

To his astonishment he was looking at a man half buried in the leaves, a man dressed in peasant costume but with a kingly-looking eye and a handsome face.

Perry stood dumfounded, and could only gaze at the man, speechless and full of fear.

"Do you want your squirrel, lad?" said the stranger, taking from the leaves the dead game, which he held up before Master Preston.

"I'll take it, if you please," and the boy took the squirrel, but did not stir.

By this time the man in the leaves had risen to his knees and was looking at the boy.

"I'm a peasant who might be wanted by those men who are after the soldiers of the unfortunate Monmouth," he said; but Perry laid one hand on his dirty sleeve.

"You'll find me true," he answered. "I know you. You are His Grace, the Duke."

The man started violently and drew back.

"I the Duke?" he cried. "Look at my garments, boy. Surely no duke ever masqueraded in such."

"But you are His Grace," persisted Perry. "I was in Taunton when you entered the city, and I remember quite well how you lifted your hat to the people and how your voice sounded."

"Then I am lost," was the reply. "I have come to this at last—to be betrayed into the hands of my enemies by a Somerset boy."

"Not so. I am not an informer. But you are in danger. They have been hunting along the hedges down yonder, for I saw a lot of rough riders beating the bush this morning."

"Beating it for poor Monmouth. Oh, if I had an army once more at my back——"

He stopped suddenly and looked away while he seemed to tremble.

"They are quite near us," said Master Preston. "There is a chance for you."

"What sort of chance, boy?"

"The old milk-house."

"Yours?"

"Yes. It is an old affair, but it has a false floor put down by its builder long ago. But you cannot go to it while it is light."

"Then back to my bed of leaves I must go," said Monmouth, with a smile. "If I escape, boy, you may some day be a duke yourself."

A few minutes later Master Preston trudged homeward with his squirrel and dressed it in the cramped front yard by the humble home.

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He said nothing to his mother, a widow, about his encounter with the hunted fugitive, and eagerly waited for dusk.

By-and-bye he went to the old milk-house, now rarely used, for the king's men some years before had taken the widow's last cow, and there he prised up a board and disclosed a commodious hiding-place underneath.

"The last place they'll look for the Duke in," said the boy. "He will be safe here."

Away he went to the wood, and, like a keen trailer, found the log and the fugitive behind it.

Without a word the two hurried back to the milk-house by a circuitous path, and Master Perry concealed the great Duke under the old boards.

As Monmouth pressed the boy's hand in parting, he looked up into the youthful face and said:

"May you be a duke some day whether I become king or not," and then Perry put the boards over him and went away.

* * * * *

Hardly had the boy reached home when six men rode up to the house and called the widow out.

They were members of Feversham's army—the general who had defeated Monmouth's forces—and they were looking for the fugitive. Master Preston came out of the house with his mother and looked at the gaudy but dirt-spattered regimentals and the rough faces of the cavaliers.

The moment one of the fellows spied Perry he covered him with his gloved hand.

"That's the boy," cried he. "Come, you little jackanapes. What were you doing in the wood to-day?"

"Hunting, sir," said the widow's son. "I shot a grey squirrel in the forest, as mother here can testify, for we had it for supper and ——"

"Who crept across the lane with you after dark?"

Master Preston did not quail. The crisis had come and the ordeal was before him.

"Some one with me?" he exclaimed. "I went into the forest quite alone and came home in like manner, sir."

"But there are tracks of two parties in the soft mud of the old lane down yonder. Come, boy. You can't deceive the riders of the King, and it is high treason to shelter this rebel, Monmouth."

At mention of the hunted man's name Mrs. Preston clasped her hands and turned pale while she looked at her son.

Perry remembered that the ground in the old lane they had crossed on their way to the milk-house was quite soft and liable to leave there the impress of their shoes; but he did not immediately reply.

"A good many people cross the lane," said he at last, "I don't doubt that there be foot-prints in the ground there."

"And one of the prints shows the elegant foot-track of the rebel whom we broke at Sedgemoor."

"My son is honest," at this juncture exclaimed the widow. "I know him to be civil and kind, and he went to the wood to-day, not to hide Monmouth, but to get a squirrel with his bow."

"Yes, and he brought down more important game," broke in the leader of the detachment. "Here, come up on the saddle, boy," and the man darted at Perry, who before he could get beyond his reach, was seized and jerked off his feet.

In another moment the boy found himself on the saddle before the trooper, who looked him sternly in the face as he continued.

"We want the rebel, boy. Don't deceive us. Where have you hid Monmouth?"

In an instant fire seemed to light up the widow's eyes and she remembered the indignities she had suffered at the hands of the troopers of King James, for she cried out:

"If you've made a promise, Perry, stick to it. Keep your word, boy, even if given to Monmouth!"

The troopers looked daggers at the woman and one thrust out his sword, but she sprang out of the way and laughed at him.

"We'll wring the little chick's neck but what we'll make him tell where the rebel is," said the captain of the detachment. "The King will have no nonsense and, boy or man, the person who refuses to betray the hiding-place of the arch-rebel, Monmouth, shall feel His Majesty's displeasure."

With this the little troop wheeled, and Master Preston, held firmly to the saddle, was carried away.

A few yards from the house the men halted and all crowded round the man who held Perry prisoner.

"Where is he, boy?" they asked.

Perry looked into the rough faces and saw no leniency there; then he glanced at their broad swords, the very weapons that had wrought such ruin at Sedgemoor, and for a moment contemplated the general mien of the six.

"You haven't proved to me that there are footprints in the mud in the old lane," said the boy.

"But we can," was the answer. "You want to be convinced, do you? To the lane you shall be taken."

* * * * *

In a little while the boy was taken to the spot, and when it was reached one of the men dismounted and led his horse toward a certain spot.

A full moon was in the sky, and in some places the ground was plainly visible and the very blades of grass that covered it.

They had entered the lane which Perry and the Duke had crossed on their way to the old milk-house and presently all stood on the bare place.

"Put the lad down here," said the man who had gone forward afoot. "I want to show him what a dainty footprint the hunted fox makes. Here it is, as plain as when we left it, and here beside it is the rougher boot-track of the widow's bairn."

In compliance with the request the captain of the troop put Perry down, at the same time telling the trooper on the ground to take hold of his wrist and escort him to the proof-spot.

Master Preston felt a hand at his wrist and he was led forward in a jiffy.

"There they are, your tracks and those of the arch-rebel's!" exclaimed the cavalier. "You crossed here. Why, everybody in England knows the print of Monmouth's foot, no matter if he wears a shepherd's boots."

At the same time Perry was pushed forward and roughly held over the soft ground.

He saw the tracks he and Monmouth had made; they seemed to accuse him of treason to the King, but he did not quail.

"You see them, boy? Now, sirrah, where is the fox?"

It was the captain of the band who spoke, and Perry straightened in the moonlight.

At the same time the man who held his wrist seemed to give him a little freedom, for the grip relaxed as Master Preston looked at the trooper's horse.

It was a lithe-limbed chestnut, such as he once rode

among the Mendip Hills when on a visit to his uncle, and an idea flashed through the boy's brain.

"I give you a minute, boy. We cannot wait here all night while you know where the rebel is. Stand aside, Goschen. He is safe here."

The trooper who had dismounted stood aside, quite releasing Master Preston; but the next moment an event of startling importance took place.

The Somerset boy sprang toward the horse and caught the rein as he left the ground.

His movement was agile as the leap of a squirrel, and before the astonished cavalrymen could interfere he was on the the horse's back, tearing up the lane like mad.

Through the moonlight, like an arrow from his own cross-bow, went the boy, and in a little while five steeds were tearing after him, amid the clanking of heavy sabres and the shouting of vile epithets.

It was a race in favour of the boy who knew every foot of the road, and at a certain spot he turned aside where some bars were down and galloped across a meadow.

Fatigued and in no good humour the five horsemen came back after a long chase, compelled to admit that a boy had beaten them, while several miles from the spot Master Preston, hidden in a safe retreat, congratulated himself upon his escape.

All that night did the troopers watch the widow's house in hopes that the boy would ride back and fall into their clutches, but he did not oblige them, and at daylight they went away.

All the next day the hunted man remained under the floor of the old milk-house, and at night he was piloted away by his little rescuer, who, upon parting with him, received as a keepsake the Duke's ring.

It was Monmouth's last escape from the snares of his persistent pursuers, for the following day he was taken and carried to London.

During his imprisonment there he did not forget the boy who had saved his life in the Somerset forest, for he was permitted to address Master Preston a letter, and there is little doubt that had Monmouth reached the throne he would have kept his promise and made Master Preston the youngest Duke in England.

T. C. HARBAUGH.

THE BELFRY.

"IT was the end of December," old Père la Chouette said, one day, "just as it is now, excepting that that year was the terrible '70.' It was so cold that the very atmosphere seemed frozen, and snow, thick snow, stifling all sound, covered all the roads and paths.

"The Prussians had not reached St. Martin yet, but one could feel that they were coming through the forest; three days ago we had heard two dull reverberations, borne on the still, winter air, which told us that they had blown up the bridges. After that we had no news, communication with Evreux being broken; it was terrible, the silence which walled us in, as it were, from the outer world; and it was the more terrible because we all felt that there was worse behind.

"The company of the 202nd Regiment that was garrisoning the village had no orders upon which to act, and Captain Bougeart said at last—the church clock was striking four and night was already gathering:

"'I cannot stay here; I risk being captured with all my men without the chance of firing a single shot; the village lies in a hollow, it is impossible to defend it. I shall establish myself on the hill-side towards Guirandières and from there try to re-open communications with my brigadier.'

"He drew me apart—he knew me well, and knew, too, that I was an old soldier.

"'They are not sorry to see me leave,' he murmured, pointing to the group of the principal inhabitants of our little village, 'and—well—they are quite right. If I stayed they would only have to meet a heavier levy, and perhaps they would see their property destroyed under their very eyes. But, Père la Choutte, you can do me a service: if the Prussians come, find a means of warning me. One of your village urchins will pass anywhere, through anything, a gun-shot can be heard a long way off in this still, cold air; a bell rung—by accident, of course, would be even better. I shall be on the alert and shall know what it means.'

"I promised what he asked, and shortly afterwards they moved off, retreating through the cold, grey light reflected from the snow. When I saw the last uniform disappear it seemed to me that I was no longer in France.

"I entered my little cottage and was unbooking the iron pot which always hung over the fire in order to pour out my soup when I heard sounds outside: rapid trotting horses' hoofs beating, muffled, on the thick, soft snow.

"I stooped and peeped through a chink in the window shutter and I saw four great brutes of Uhlans dimly outlined against the frosty sky; what little light was reflected from the snow showed me their horses and vague shadowy figures of men, each with his slender lance, a black line upon the night.

"Suddenly they dismounted and crept stealthily through the village, and half-an-hour later we were invaded, silently, without a single cry or a word of command to break the silence of the night, as by an army of shadows.

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"It occurred to me that if Captain Bougeart were not warned he might fall back upon the village the next day and would be killed or taken prisoner with all his men. There must have been a whole division of the enemy, more were arriving every moment. I could hear the heavy wheels of artillery crunching the frost-bitten roads.

"Could I make my way to the Captain? It was not to be thought of for a moment. I had sprained my ankle a fortnight previously and I was no longer young, even in those far off days. I could hardly drag one leg after the other for the shortest distance. A messenger?—where could I find one at that time of the night? He would be caught and shot, to a certainty.

"And then I thought of my post as bell-ringer; it was not for nothing that we had a great bell that could be heard as far as three leagues away. I hastily put on my sheepskin coat and went out. I knew what I was going to do.

"The street was full of troops, horses, and baggage waggons. They had not lighted any bivouac fires, and at each exit from the village guards were posted to prevent anyone from leaving the place. They were evidently meditating some sudden *coup*, and I reflected, sadly, that a body of our troops was in the neighbourhood and would probably fall victims to an ambush if they were not warned.

"I went out with the most unconcerned air I could assume under the circumstances. *They* only saw in me an old man, halt and lame, limping feebly along, and they paid no attention to me. I had the key of the church, and I entered and locked myself in. I was on familiar ground, and, lighting a lantern, I found that all was well. The bell-rope hung down within reach of my hand; I simply had to pull it. But it occurred to me that, at the first stroke, the Prussians would break down the door and compel me to silence, perhaps before our troops had heard the signal.

"So I turned towards the narrow, winding stairs and was soon in the organ-loft: there again, I decided, I was too near the enemy.

"*Ma foi!* I had to climb still higher, in spite of my bad foot. It was not easy, for the staircase only run to the level of the triforium, and then I had to take to a ladder. And no one who did not know the peal of bells and its frame-work as well as I could have ventured there in the dark, for in many places there was nothing but an iron rod or, perhaps, a bolt-head projecting from the face of a beam to serve as foot-hold.

"Courage! By hook or by crook, straining every muscle, every nerve, I gradually pulled myself up—my ankle was terribly painful—I reached the top, the very top, and groped for my bell, my favourite big bell which seemed to thrill to my touch. Without pausing to regain my breath I drew the clapper towards me and great waves of sound filled the belfry and floated out upon the air. Another single stroke and then I rang without stopping the terrifying tocsin. Boom! boom! the great bell pealed, almost stunning me, rousing all the country-side.

"The village far below me began to show signs of life; between the strokes of the bell I heard people running and calling one to another, then someone beat upon the church-door.

"'Will you stop that infernal din?' a voice called out in a gutteral German accent.

"*Boom! boom!*

"Then I heard something whistle through the air and immediately afterwards the sound of a shot. They were firing at me.

"A noise of breaking timber, of iron-studded panels striking the pavement, and then I heard footsteps in the church and on the little winding stair.

"'Will you come down and at once? *Schweinpelz!*' the same voice cried. 'Wait till I can get hold of you!'

"They were climbing!

"Feverishly I swung the great clapper to and fro and, to my great joy, between the waves of sound, I heard the answering peals from the churches of Saint Leu and Morgny—in the far distance I thought I could distinguish the sound of the bells of Azay—they were in the triforium below me now!

"The reverberations of a rifle-shot are terribly deafening when re-echoed from a stone-vaulted roof; bullets struck the beams all round me, sounding like blows from a heavy hammer as they buried themselves in the timber; one struck my bell and cracked it, making it emit a sound as of some wounded living thing. At last a voice called out:

"'*Genug! genug!*'

"I understood that to mean 'enough!' for the firing ceased and a voice gave some word of command in German. I saw a soldier lay down his rifle and glance up at the belfry as though measuring the height, then, slowly but surely, without a pause, he began to climb.

"The snow was falling in soft, thick flakes; they drifted in at the *louvres* of the bell-chamber, covering all the beams and iron rods, and I realised that if I were saved from the fate which seemed so near me I should owe my delivery to the kindly snow. Already I felt as though the Prussian's hand gripped my shoulder.

"He climbed carefully, making sure of each foot-hold as he mounted; from time to time he threw back his head so as to be able to see where I was, and I could make out his face with its blue eyes and good-natured expression.

"How I hated him! It seemed as though there was no escape for me. When he reached the stays he hesitated—the cold iron must have burnt his hands—perhaps his head turned when he saw nothing but a black abyss below him and all around the thick, white snowflakes falling, always falling. I heard the nails of his boot grate on the ironwork and he let go his hold with both hands. I watched him fall and disappear into the chasm below, I heard the dull thud of his body as it rebounded from one beam to another and then the sickening crash on the floor of the church.

"And through it all I heard the distant bells ringing—I felt each stroke beat upon my strained nerves until I could have screamed.

"At length a rent appeared in the sky, and, slowly, a little light began to show me the surrounding country. From my belfry I saw all the familiar features of the landscape emerge one by one, and far away below me lay the village—there were people in the streets. I could see their white, upturned faces as they tried to discern me. At the foot of the tower a squad of Prussians were piling faggots against the walls; they were going to smoke me out as they would have done some fox.

"All at once I heard a volley of rifle-shots and the gay notes of the French bugles—how I love their sound—the Germans ran to arms, surprised and in disorder.

* * * * * *

"They had to lower me down by a pully, I was so stiff with cold; and I have never been able to understand what mysterious power enabled me to climb up there in safety that terrible night."

Francois de Noin.

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THE YOUNG MAN FROM TEXAS.

I.

THE Prince was smitten, and he was going home. There was nothing contagious about it: simply a species of homesickness, savouring of remorse: nothing worse. By my reference to this individual as the "Prince," the reader must not assume him to be possessed of that royal blueness of blood so popular a gift amongst princes of regal extraction.

The "Prince" was merely one of those honorary titles bestowed by an approving coterie of acquaintances.

He was princely in his habits and dress, princely in his vices and virtues, and princely in his open-handedness, in fact, princely in everything save birth, and this circumstance may probably account for his alienation from his family.

When quite a beardless youth, he had set off to seek diversion in foreign lands. For years had he dropped all connection with his relatives in the way of correspondence, memories, and so forth. And now, by dint of some spontaneous revolution his heart turned again to the scenes of his boyhood.

His latter day friends wrestled with his new resolve. They opened their yearning hearts; they beseeched, they flattered, they promised, they threatened, all in turn, but to no avail. With an affectionate look he put these all aside; and accordingly, early in the month of February, we find him waiting at New York for the English steamer.

On his way to the quay he had been attracted by the frequent recurrence—so to speak—of a strange young man. This personage had first arrested his attention by the peculiarity of his dress; but afterwards it seemed to the Prince that the young gentleman was dogging him.

As for the twentieth time the Prince met him, he said something my pen refuses to fashion.

Taking his place on the vessel he awaited her departure, drawing a happy breath as she left the mooring and steamed out to sea.

Night fell, and the Prince went on deck for a constitutional, soliloquising beneath the breezy boon of tobacco. He made for the bow, possibly intending to poetise upon the "Prodigal's Return."

Reaching it, he saw what he fancied to be the figure-head swaying. He put out his hand to save it. Strangely, it had a coat-tail, and as he tugged the pale face of the strange young man bent its glance upon him. Instantly the Prince resorted to his unsanctified vocabulary, in response to which the strange young man muttered:

"I beg your pardon?"

"Oh, nothing!" returned the Prince mildly. "You look pale—have some brandy?"

"Thanks! Don't—mind——" Here the strange young man looked yearningly at the ocean and said no more until the liquor forthcame.

With this introduction they remained friendly and reached London in company.

It was late one Saturday night when they parted at the station.

"Going home?" questioned the young man, lingering as he took the Prince's hand.

"Hm—yes! Are you?"

"Not to-night. To-morrow. I'm going to enact the part of a returned prodigal.

"Got any family—much?" asked the Prince.

"Who, the governor, or I?"

"The governor—your father, of course."

"Not large. One stalwart marriageable girl. By-the-way, too, it's her birthday to-morrow. Comes into a few ha'pence. I must see her. Shall we meet again?"

"Yes—pleased, I'm sure. Where?"

"Oh, here. Say one o'clock; before I see the judge."

"Judge? Where—who?"

"Oh, that's my governor."

They parted.

The Prince betook himself to a saloon to freshen his appearance before going home. It was rather late, but being Saturday night he thought his people might possibly be up.

Whilst standing before the mirror brushing his hair he abruptly stopped and started.

"The dickens!" he muttered beneath his breath. "Never noticed this before. H'm, awfully strange!"

He had remained gazing at his reflection some time, when the attendant notified closing time.

With the last glance at the mirror, he realised that were it not for his fragile moustache, he might be the double of his late companion, the strange young man from Texas.

With thoughts still intent upon this remarkable coincidence, he wended his way along the deserted streets towards the house he had left as "home." It hardly occurred to him the changes a few years might have wrought, and his only anxiety was "how would they receive him?"

Reaching the house, he suffered an affectionate tear to trickle down his nose, as for a moment he stood gazing upon it.

"Yes!" he thought. "The same old place, but mightily improved!"

Seeing no light, he hesitated at first about entering that night; but at the last moment of his mental debate, a yellow streak, creeping between the shutters of a lower apartment, caught his hungering eye. So, knocking softly at the door—the servants' entrance—he waited.

Before long the door opened a few inches, and a voice from behind the lubricating elements of a wax candle, whispered: "Who's there?"

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"The son and heir of this household!" answered the Prince jocosely.

He was admitted and confronted by a saucy-looking servant girl, who expressed surprise at his unexpected return.

"Do you want any supper, sir?" she asked.

"No, thanks. I'll go to bed."

"All right, sir. You can have this candle; I'll show the way."

Too tired to think more, he undressed, blew out the light, and slipped into bed. In a very few minutes, the velvet hand of sleep touched his drooping eyes and took him to perfect repose.

II.

On the following morn he sprang from bed—rubbed his eyes—yawned with an air of expectant happiness, and commenced his toilette.

His relatives, so long bereft, should not see the prodigal return in proverbial rags and disorder.

His choicest princely instinct was clear, and he dressed with all the fastidiousness of a soon-to-be bride.

Then with rife expectation, and pleasant anticipation, he betook himself to the breakfast-room.

The people waiting there heard his springy footstep on the stairs, and before he had time to realise anything, a lovely girl rushed out, threw her arms about his neck, and rained a perfect hurricane of tears and kisses in the neighbourhood of his nether lip.

He was dazed, literally astounded. What did it mean?

He had no sisters or such like, and here was this strange, stupefying beauty rhapsodising over him, as though he had just escaped the jaws of death.

The maiden drew back, surveying him at arm's length.

"Yes!" she cried delightedly. "It is indeed Sammy, and see, mamma, he has grown such a lovely moustache. Oh, however *did* you do it?"

Here she kissed him again, and hugged him into the room. To attempt a characterisation of the Prince's feelings would be a wicked waste of time and paper.

No sooner had he passed the door, than a massive, judicial-looking man came forward.

"Samuel!" he said profoundly—and the spoons chattered with the chinaware—"Samuel, my boy, we have no words upon our lips adequate to such an occasion as this, and the language of our heart must appear weak if examined. Let us then dispense with words and ceremony—silence being the most eloquent and, and—begin breakfast!"

But for the blushing Prince the worst part of the ordeal had been in reserve, for at this juncture a stately old lady with corkscrew curls came forward, drew his head down to her level, and kissed him once on the forehead, once on each cheek, finally concluding with an amalgamated array of six upon the lips.

"Welcome, Samuel!" said she. "Welcome, thrice welcome, on this happy day!"

He looked about in poorly disguised amazement. As in his sleeping apartment, *this* room was altered. It was certainly the same chamber he recalled as "breakfast-room," but yet how different; and how superbly furnished. Then again that pompous-censorial old fogey was not the father he had known, nor the stately old lady his mother.

For the second time he pondered the question—what did it mean? In a trice the answer occurred to him.

His people had gone—removed—were dead, or something of the sort. Certainly.

It was years ago that he left home, and these present tenants had mistaken him for some well-remembered friend, returning after a long sojourn.

But it was his *duty* to speak. He *must*, he *would* speak, and was about to do so in spite of all, when his curiosity prompted him to delay a little longer.

Breakfast being over, the host suggested a walk before luncheon, and the young people delightedly acquiesced. However, before they had gone far, an old fogey occupant of a passing carriage beckoned to the guardian. Excusing himself, as he said, on business, adding, with a smile, his suspicions that they would be happier alone, he seated himself beside his friend and drove off.

They were in a lovely, half rural road, and he could no longer endure the weight of his deceit.

Bracing his nerves, he was about to declare himself, when his lovely companion interrupted him. She had been scrutinising his face askance. The indication she looked for came, and so she spoke:

"Don't speak!" she began. "I know what you are going to say. I am very glad you determined to tell me at once, for it makes me think well of you!"

The Prince looked thunderstruck. Well he might; but his amazement was followed by a look of sorrow.

"This," he said with conscious pain, "should come from me. I was just——"

"Yes, I know you were, but I anticipated you. Don't blame yourself. You could not have spoken earlier, since I interrupted you at breakfast. I hold you quite blameless, and so will papa. I saw my mistake at once; but how *could* I retract just then?" Here a barely perceptible flush mantled her lovely face, and the Prince imagined her to be what she almost was—divine in body as in soul.

"Now, look here," she continued, "I have been thinking about this, and I want to keep it up. You see how well pleased dear mamma and papa both are; let them remain so. I am willing to take all the blame of the deception. Will you do it for me, please?"

"Oh, I cannot allow that!" he said quickly. "It is too selfish of me. Besides, how vexed must they inevitably be when they learn the truth."

"Ah, but it won't be so bad, really, and—and——" (here her voice trembled almost pleadingly) "perhaps you have—no home!"

For just a moment she broke down, and her head turned gently aside. From that instant for ever after the Prince would willingly have died for her.

"To please me!" she said at length, smiling upon him with glistening eyes.

"To please you," he answered in a low tone, broken by tender emotion. Although quite manly in thoughts and deeds, he had to exercise superhuman restraint to avoid kneeling to her with streaming eyes.

"Will you tell me your name, please?" she asked him next.

"You know it, since you have used it already," he rejoined.

"Ah, that was a peculiar coincidence. I mean your second name, though."

"Marnham. Samuel Marnham!"

She stood suddenly still, regarding him curiously.

"Samuel Marnham," she repeated softly. Then, after a pause: "Mine is Worseley!"

"Agnes!"

That was all, but each fully understood; mutually recalling one thrilling scene enacted long years ago in company. From the breast pocket of his coat the Prince drew a little parcel. Unswathing a ridiculous amount

of cotton wool and paper, he produced a Humane Society's medal, with his own name and that of Agnes Worseley graven upon it.

She took it carefully from him as though it were some cherished token of a departed friend.

"Oh, let me keep it!" she beseeched. For, after all, the Prince was no stranger—only a rescued friend from the ruins of bygone days.

"But however did you mistake me, and who for?" questioned he as they turned homewards.

"I thought you were my brother, who went away a long, long while ago, and hasn't since returned. You are very like him. You see papa is mistaken as well."

And so in this strain they continued to talk until their arrival home.

The Prince never once thought of his experience the day before, or of his appointment for the present day, so great was his absorption in the lovely peace and happiness about him.

III.

At luncheon time the house was crowded. Stately guests of both sexes flocked to the grand reception. There were lords and ladies, plain Mr.'s and Mrs.'s, noble and ignoble men, right reverend and wrong reverend gentlemen of all denominations, sizes, and shapes, but all more or less human.

The Prince studiously made himself general property, so that none had cause for conceit. He cleverly avoided making himself cheap, and, consequently, was always in request. Possessing that ineffable genius of artistic social restraint, he found that his harvest was literally a golden one.

"You are acting your part splendidly!" Agnes whispered, and for the first time a flash of excitement darted through his princely eyes, but was drowned in the heightening colour of his cheek, and instantly he became outwardly calm again.

At the conclusion of the grand dinner the Prince's success was complete. His table-talk and manners were absolutely faultless; and every maiden face plainly proclaimed its possessor had found a realisation of her ideal. Then he began to tell a story.

No one was more intent upon every gesture and word than Agnes Worseley. She seemed with her eyes to lift each utterance off the Prince's lips. Suddenly she started as she realised the story was characterising some half-fashioned anticipation she held in common with the narrative. She nudged him, but so abandoned was his eloquence that her touch evoked no response. He was nearing the climax. The audience hung upon his lips, spell-bound and open-mouthed; and with one puff he could have literally blown them to eternity.

Two minutes more and the iron hand of Fate would thunder downwards.

The listeners strained in their postures to catch each word and glance.

The Prince, pinned by every eye, writhed his burning tongue swiftly towards the crucial point. Apopletic veins seemed like to burst from every neck. A quick pulsation showed on every cheek, and bosoms were trembling and quivering beneath superhuman restraint, when the door of the room flew open, and upon the threshold stood "The Young Man from Texas!"

IV.

In the space of a thought the gases flashed up, disclosing the company in a state of speechless consternation.

For the second time a flash of excitement gleamed in the eyes of the Prince, and he looked round for Agnes.

She was close beside him.

The strange young man came directly up, and grasping him warmly by the hand, gave utterance to the shocking but ambiguous phrase:

"You're a fraud! Why didn't you keep your appointment?"

Then the Prince, quite perplexed and half indignant, said: "But, sir—this language? You shouldn't have sought me here. I would have explained later."

"Oh, and why not seek you here?" questioned the young man. Then turning to the astounded host and hostess, said: "Judge! Father—mother!"

A momentary pause ensued, and then the judge, with a frown on his forehead and a twinkle in his eye, rushed forward and heartily embraced that strange young man from Texas.

Then the strange young man, turning with a fraternal smile to Agnes, kissed her, afterwards deliberately beaming upon the company and saying:

"Permit me to introduce my friend—a—a—Mr.—— What's your name?"

"Marnham—Samuel Marnham," responded the Prince, now fairly recovered.

"The dickens it is, though," ejaculated the strange young man in genuine surprise and unaffected warmth. And shaking the Prince's hand more heartily than ever, continued: "I'm deucedly glad of that though, upon my soul," and inwardly the judge echoed the same sentiment. With humourous profundity in one eye, and terrible censure in the other, he approached the Prince, exclaiming:

"Explain, sir. What is the meaning of this freak?" But before the other could reply, Agnes stepped forward, holding high the medal.

"Papa, papa, see this! My name and his coupled here together! You *must* remember, papa. He is the son of your old friend, Sir David. You *must* remember him! He saved——"

"*I* know all about *that!*" roared the Judge, trying to grow red in the face.

"Well, papa," said Agnes, hardly able to suppress her laughter, "aren't you going to forgive us? Besides, it was all my fault—really, truly."

As the door closed upon the last of his guests, the Judge, giving way, laughed consumedly, and the whole family was made to sit up into the small hours of the morrow to pacify and quell his boisterous mirth.

When at length the family party arose, the Judge's eyes were suspiciously moist. Taking the Prince's hand, he said with true affection: "You will stay with us—long——!"

That was all he could manage, but it was said in that peculiar manner admitting of no alternative reply.

As requested, the Prince remained the Judge's guest for the next day, and the next week, and the next month, and so on for a long while; and so generously devoted did the pair become that the Judge, upon request, granted the Prince the freehold of two valuable properties, to wit, the beautiful Agnes and the house next door.

The self-same guests who attended the Judge's feast were at the wedding also; upon which occasion the indigo-dye millionaire confidentially declared to several marriageable young ladies, that neither the Prince nor the large-hearted Judge were so much to blame for the general deprivation as the strange young man from Texas.

Dunstan Denn.

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A LEGEND OF THE FLOWERY KINGDOM.

WHO is there, since the earliest dawn of intelligent perception, that has not wondered at the peculiar picture on the old and familiar willow-pattern china? Who has not studied the odd figures and tried to guess at their meaning? And yet I dare say there are few of us who have ever heard the story, which is as familiar to the natives of the Flowery Kingdom as Robinson Crusoe or Rip Van Winkle is to us.

The tale was related to me by a lady who has travelled extensively in China, and who, prompted one day by mere woman's curiosity, determined to learn what the picture meant.

In the first place, the name, "willow-ware," is taken from the tree which occupies the lower left centre of the plate, and which is supposed to represent a willow in spring unfolding its blossoms before its leaves appear.

On the right hand of the plate is seen a Chinese house supposed to be of unusual size and magnificence, the wealth and resources of the owner being indicated by its being two storeys high, and also by the large and rare trees which surround the building. This residence belonged to a wealthy and powerful mandarin, named Woo Tsang, a close friend of the Emperor and generally acknowledged as possessing great influence. In his household dwelt with him his wife and daughter and his private secretary, Mok Chang, who attended to the details of the mandarin's duties and was allowed to reside with the family.

After the death of the mandarin's wife, that official importuned the Emperor to release him from his duties and permit him to retire to private life. This, of course necessitated the discharge of the secretary, Chang, who, it seems, had fallen deeply in love with the mandarin's daughter, Koong-see, and not in vain, for his love was returned.

Every evening after sunset, Koong-see was observed to linger on the steps which led to the banquet-ball, and when twilight came on, she would steal down the garden path with her faithful maid to a remote part of the grounds and meet her lover. And there also did the lovers meet on the eve of Chang's dismissal and exchange vows of mutual love and constancy. But many evenings afterwards, when the discharged secretary was supposed to be miles and miles away, lovers' whispers might have been heard among the orange trees, and as darkness came on, the large peonies which grew against the wall had their gorgeous petals destroyed by Chang as he climbed through the brilliant blossoms.

By the assistance of Koong-see's maid, these interviews were kept secret from the mandarin, for the lovers well knew the hard customs of the country where social rank was unequal.

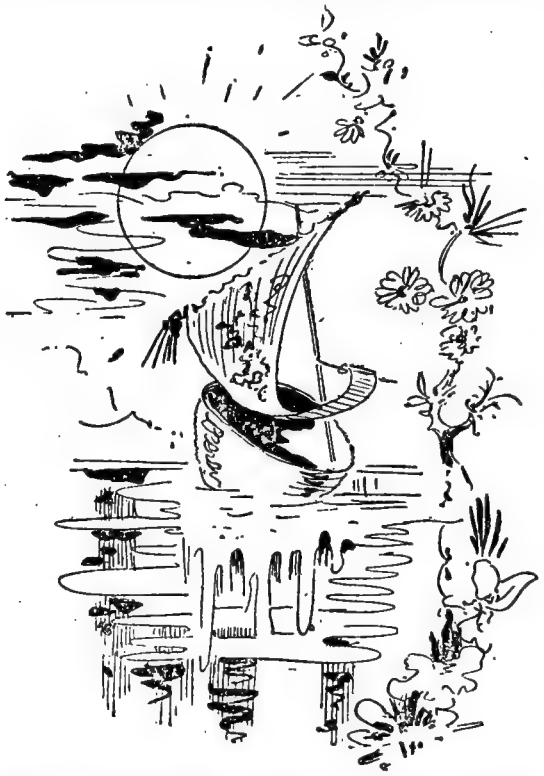
Chang's merit, however, was admitted everywhere, and the young people pictured a time when all obstacles would be removed by Chang's success in diplomacy and trade. But, by some manner or other, a rumour reached the ears of the old mandarin of what was going on, and he forbade Koong-see to go beyond the walls of the house, and as for Chang, he was threatened with prompt death if he continued his visits. Furthermore, the mandarin had a high fence built across the pathway from the walls of his home to the water's edge. This is the zig-zag fence which appears at the lower end of the picture.

Finally, after all these precautions, Koong-see's maid was discharged, and her place was supplied by an elderly woman, whose heart was as shrivelled as her face. To further provide for his daughter's imprisonment, and at the same time to give her needed exercise and fresh air, the mandarin had a suite of rooms built adjoining his own banquet-hall, and projecting out over the water and surrounded by a terrace upon which Koong-see could walk in safety. These rooms will be seen to the left of the mandarin's house in the picture.

When all this was completed the old mandarin rested, convinced that there would no longer be any more clandestine meetings between his daughter and the discharged Chang. However, to still further satisfy himself, the mandarin engaged Koong-see to a wealthy friend of his, Ta-jin, a noble of very high degree, and in every way the equal of the girl except in age, he being probably about sixty years old. The wedding was decided upon without any consultation whatever with Koong-see, and it was to take place at the "fortunate age of the moon, when the peach tree should blossom, in the spring." The willow tree was then already in blossom, but the peach tree had scarcely begun to bud.

Poor Koong-see shuddered at her doom, and trembled as she watched the buds of the peach tree as they slowly blossomed forth. But one day she was cheered by a happy omen; a bird came and built its nest in the corner above her window. One afternoon, as she sat watching the little architect carrying bits of straws and feathers to its future home, her attention was attracted

to a cocoanut shell which floated gently at her feet, and which was fitted up with a miniature sail. She picked it up and in it found a small pearl she had once given her



lover, and a piece of rice paper on which was written in the handwriting of Chang, these verses:

The nest yon winged artists build
Some robber-bird shall tear away;
So yields her hopes the affianced bride,
The wealthy lord's reluctant prey.

The fluttering bird prepares a home
In which the spoiler soon shall dwell;
Forth goes the weeping bride, constrained;
A hundred cars the triumph swell.

Mourn for the tiny architect;
A stronger bird has ta'en its nest.
Mourn for the hopeless, stolen bride;
How vain the hopes to soothe her breast.

On the other side of the paper was written these words: "As this boat sails to you, so all my thoughts tend to the same centre; but when the willow blossoms drop from the bough, and the peach tree unfolds its buds, your faithful Chang will sink with the lotus blooms beneath the deep waters. There will he see the circles on the smooth river when the willow blossoms fall upon it from the bough—broken away, like his love, from the parent stem."

Then as a sort of postscript was added: "Cast thy thoughts upon the waters as I have done, and I shall hear thy words."

When Koong-see finished reading, she burst into tears. "He has not forgotton me," she cried, "he still loves me." Then she hid the little boat and the message in the folds of her loose flowing dress.

Koong-see well understood what her lover meant, and trembled as she thought of his threat of self-destruction. Then she took out her little ivory tablets, and with her embroidery needle wrote: "Do not wise husbandmen gather the fruit they fear will be stolen? The sunshine lengthens, and the vineyard is threatened by the hands of strangers. The fruit you most prize will be gathered when the willow blossoms droop and fall to the earth."

Much doubting, she placed this message in the miniature cocoanut-shell boat, and, after the manner of her countrywomen, put therein a piece of frankincense and launched the shell upon the water and watched it as the current of the stream gently drew it away, and she could no longer see it in the distance.

Days and weeks passed on, but no answering message appeared; all intercourse between the lovers seemed at an end, and poor Koong-see became more and more disheartened and discouraged. The blossoms on the willow tree were nearly ready to wither and drop, and additional alarm was aroused in her heart by a visit from her father, who seemed to be in the best of spirits. In his arms he bore a huge box, filled with the rarest of jewels—a present from old Ta-jin.

The mandarin then said that the happy suitor was coming that day to enter into the preliminaries of marriage, such as taking wine and food at the house of the bride's father. Like a bird in a snare, poor Koong-see felt that the toils were being drawn closer and closer, and her heart gave way in despair as she looked about her and saw no way of escape.

Ta-jin came, his servants preceding him, beating gongs and shouting his achievements in war. The number of his titles was very extensive, and the lanterns on which they were all inscribed were magnificent. Owing to his high rank, he was borne on an elaborate sedan with eight bearers, thus showing his position to be that of a viceroy.

While all this revelry, drinking, and feasting was going on, a poor stranger presented himself at the door of the banquet-hall and asked for alms. No attention was paid him, however, and finally becoming apparently weary of begging, he took from the porch an outer garment that had been carelessly left there, and throwing it about his shoulders he quietly drew a screen across the banquet-hall doorway, and passing behind it he slipped into Koong-see's apartments. In another moment he had made himself known—it was Chang, and the meeting of the lovers was touching in the extreme. Quickly then did Chang beseech his sweetheart to fly with him. "For," said he, "the willow blossoms already droop upon the bough, and the wise husbandman has come to gather in his fruit."

Koong-see was delighted at the sudden turn of affairs, and at once consented to her lover's wishes. She gave to him the box of jewels Ta-jin had presented to her that day, and, watching a favourable opportunity, the lovers stole from the house. They had reached the bridge at the foot of the willow tree, shown in the picture, when the mandarin became aware of his daughter's flight, as he happened to catch a glimpse of her through the door, and, raising a fearful cry, he himself rushed in pursuit of the fleeing couple.

This part of the story is represented by the three figures on the bridge. The first is Koong-see, following her is Chang, and in the rear is the old mandarin. As the Chinese artist knows nothing of perspective, he could not place the enraged father in any other position than in the peculiar proximity in which he is represented. The sketch simply illustrates the flight and pursuit, and is sufficiently graphic for that purpose.

The old mandarin, intoxicated as he had become during the feast, had some difficulty in keeping up the

chase, and Chang and Koong-see eluded him without great effort. The few servants who were sober enough to have successfully pursued the couple were detained to wait upon Ta-jin, he having worked himself into a monstrous rage when he learnt what had occurred, and so great was his fury that he frothed and foamed at the mouth—and it was thought that he had fallen into a fit, and thus the lovers made good their escape.

Every plan possible was adopted during the following days to discover where the undutiful daughter and her lover had fled; but when the servants returned night after night and brought no intelligence which afforded any hope of finding them, the mandarin gave himself up to despair and became a prey to low spirits and ill-humour.

Ta-jin, however, continued active and persevering, and employed spies in every village for miles round; he made a solemn vow of vengeance against Chang, and congratulated himself that by his power as a magistrate of the district he could exercise his authority, and when Chang should be discovered he would instantly suffer an awful death. Koong-see, too, should die, he said, unless she fulfilled the wishes of her father—not for his own satisfaction, but for the sake of public justice.

Meantime, the lovers were in hiding at no great distance from the mandarin's home, having sought refuge in the humble cottage of the mandarin's gardener, which is shown in the picture on the opposite side, and to the left of the bridge. Here also Koong-see found her former maid, who, it seems, was the wife of the gardener. Through these faithful people the lovers learnt of the steps taken by their pursuers, and thus they were successful in eluding them for a long time.

At last the mandarin issued a proclamation, stating that he would forgive Chang and his daughter on condition that they would return to his home, whereupon the innocent gardener evinced such joy at his master's relenting that he brought suspicion on himself, and his house was ordered to be watched. But far more knowing was Chang than the gardener, and he knew full well that the proclamation which the mandarin had issued was only a ruse, and he quickly decided to escape from the gardener's home with Koong-see at the first opportunity. A week passed by and still the lovers remained in hiding in the cottage of the gardener.

One evening at the end of the week, however, a soldier knocked at the door and was admitted by the gardener's wife. He entered and read the proclamation of the mandarin, and then pointed out the many advantages to be gained by all the parties concerned who should assist in restoring to the arms of the mandarin his daughter, and how she could then become the wife of Chang. The attachment of the gardener's wife for her former mistress was enough to enable her to keep her presence of mind, and after appearing exceedingly curious as to what reward she would obtain if she were successful in discovering the missing couple, she led the soldier to believe that she thought they were in hiding at a place not far distant, and if he would first obtain a distinct promise of reward in the handwriting of the mandarin, she would do all in her power to lead them to Chang and Koong-see. To this the soldier agreed, but he declared that he must leave a guard round the house. Of course, the poor woman dared not object to this, but she remonstrated loudly and severely concerning the impropriety of a lot of rough soldiers being left without the restraint of a commander, and thus she afforded the trembling lovers an opportunity to overhear what was passing, and of the dangerous position they were all in.

As soon as the soldier had taken his leave a brief conference was held between the lovers and their protectors. Only a few minutes, an hour at the most, was all they could call their own. In front of the house was the suspicious guard, ordered to allow no one to enter or leave the place, and in the rear was the broad river and no boat at hand. Something must be done, as Chang well knew that to remain where they were would mean separation, and for himself a terrible death. He saw plainly through the mandarin's scheme of issuing the proclamation, whereby he pretended to forgive the eloping lovers, as simply a bait to tempt them to return. Their only hope was in escape. But how? The river was the one chance.

"It is the only means of escape left us," said Chang, "and I must swim across the river and secure a boat on the opposite side."

"You will be seen and murdered in the water. No, no; do not attempt it," pleaded poor Koong-see.

"It is our only chance," cried Chang, as he slipped off his "poqua," or loose outer garment, which is worn by the higher classes, or those seeking literary honours.

Koong-see clung to her lover, but his resolution was firm, and bidding her to be of good cheer, since he would return soon, he sprang from the window into the stream below. Long before her lover had reached the

other side of the river Koong-see fainted. Her faithful maid laid her on a couch, and after reviving her they both stationed themselves at the window and anxiously watched for Chang's return. While they watched a sudden knock was heard on the outer door. The gardener's wife could scarcely bring herself to leave

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Koong-see, but no other course was left her; she must leave her mistress alone.

Going from the room she securely closed the door behind her and drew a screen across to conceal it. When she opened the outer door she found the soldier had returned, bearing with him a document from the mandarin in which was offered large sums of money for the discovery of Chang and Koong-see, and another promise that no harm should come to them if they would return. The gardener's wife made a pretence that she could not read the writing, and giving the soldier some spirits made of rice, she further managed to divert his attention until he finally became impatient, and roughly demanded that if she knew anything of the whereabouts of the couple she should give the information at once or else suffer punishment. Thus almost an hour had been whiled away when the soldier was called out by one of the guardsmen, who told him that the mandarin had sent a messenger inquiring why Chang and his daughter had not yet been brought before him, and requiring an immediate answer from the commanding officer in person.

This gave the gardener's wife time to see what had happened in the inner room. As she entered it cautiously she saw at once that Koong-see was no longer there, and going over to the window she was just in time to see a boat rapidly drifting away in the darkness and carrying as its passengers the two lovers. Then she closed the window and awaited the return of the officer.

He came soon enough, stimulated by a severe reproof from both the mandarin and Ta-jin for his delay, and at once commanded his men to search the house. But too late; the lovers had fled and were by that time far away down the river. Then the soldiers began to suspect that the gardener's wife had played them a trick, but she looked quite innocent, and persuaded the officer that she had been imposed upon and was sorry she had given him so much trouble.

The boat as seen in the picture, floated down the river all that night, requiring no extra exertion from Chang, who sat at the prow watching over Koong-see. When morning came the boat entered the main river, the Yanktse-kiang, and their passage became more dangerous. Before the sun was well up they had joined other boats, navigated by people who lived entirely upon the river. To one of these boatmen Chang sold a jewel, which he took from the box that had been presented to Koong-see by the viceroy, and with the coin bought from another some food.

Thus the lovers floated on for several days until they reached a little island, where they decided to settle down for the remainder of their days. The jewels were all sold in neighbouring towns in such a manner as not to excite suspicion, and with the money thus procured Chang was enabled to purchase the island, and secure all such necessities as were needed for its cultivation and their future success. Here Chang and Koong-see were married, and by applying themselves to hard labour they soon had the land under prosperous cultivation.

On referring to the picture again, the reader will find the island significantly recorded in the upper left-hand corner by the simple artist. The ground is broken up into lumps, indicating recent cultivation, and the trees are small in size, signifying their youth. The home can be seen, and also the diligence of Chang is evinced by the manner in which every scrap of land is reclaimed from the water, and to further illustrate this, narrow reefs of land jut out into the river. Chang, after achieving a competence by his cultivation of the land, returned to his literary pursuits, and wrote a book on agriculture, which brought him both fame and fortune.

But with the fortune which the book brought him it also revealed his hiding-place to his greatest enemy, the viceroy, whose passion for revenge was unabated.

Having waited upon the military mandarins of the river, and having sworn, by beheading a live rooster, that Chang was the person who stole his jewels and fled with his affianced bride, Ta-jin secured an escort of soldiers and attacked the island, first giving instructions to seize Koong-see and kill Chang without mercy.

When the onslaught was finally made, the few inhabitants of the island were wholly unprepared for it, and Chang was run through the body with a sword and instantly killed, although he and his men fought bravely against the overwhelming numbers. Koong-see, on witnessing her husband's death, rushed to their home, which she set on fire, perishing in the flames.

The gods—so the legend runs—cursed the wicked Ta-jin for his cruelty with a terrible disease, and he died unpitied and alone.

As for Chang and Koong-see, they were transformed into two immortal doves, emblems of constancy, which had rendered them faithful in life, and in death undivided.

And that is the legend of the Flowery Kingdom—the tale of the willow-ware china.

MAX STEINLE.

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A HAUNTED RAILWAY CARRIAGE.

"YES," said Wingrave thoughtfully, as he removed his pipe from his mouth, "there *are* some queer ghost stories going about, I admit."

"Of course there are," said the Artist, "most unaccountable stories too, except upon the hypothesis that there are ghosts also. Why, once when I was staying at Penzance——"

"Oh, be quiet," growled the Doctor, "we've all heard that story before, and you needn't go on to tell us that you're a member of the Psychical Research Society. We've heard *that* about fifty times. For my part I don't believe in ghosts. Do *you*, Wingrave?"

"I don't know. Never made up my mind on the subject."

We were sitting round the fire, a party of four, in the Doctor's sanctum, and the conversation had turned upon the subject of ghosts. The Artist, we all knew, believed in them thoroughly, but the Doctor was a sceptic, and so, for the matter of that, was I too. We had been trying to "draw" Wingrave on the subject, but as yet had not succeeded in getting an opinion out of him. The Artist had related an awful and blood-curdling yarn about a headless spectre, which the Doctor had pooh-poohed, while I had been narrating the somewhat strange experiences of a friend of mine in a reputed haunted house, drawing, perhaps, a little on my imagination for the "facts." But all this, apparently, had no effect on Wingrave. Presently, however, he said:

"I always think myself that one of the strangest things is that so-called haunted carriage on the Brighton line."

"What haunted carriage?" we all asked.

"Why, don't you know? Haven't you ever travelled by the last train from Brighton to London, leaving Brighton at 10.35?"

The Doctor said he had once, but he didn't remember anything peculiar about it.

"Did you try to get in the second-class compartment nearest the engine?" asked Wingrave.

"No, I was travelling third. But why do you ask?"

"Well, you *couldn't* have got in if you'd tried!"

"Why couldn't he?" said the Artist.

"Because it's always kept locked as far as Hassocks. It's a well-known fact on the line: any official at Brighton will tell you so."

"But *why* is it kept locked?" I asked.

"Do you mean to say you *really* don't know?" asked Wingrave in reply.

"No," we replied, "let's have the story."

"Oh, I thought everyone knew it. But here it is. The thing itself happened in '89 or '90, I forget which now. There was an old gentleman named Buxton who had a jeweller's shop in the King's Parade, Brighton, and another somewhere in the Strand. These shops were managed by his two sons, one of whom lived on the premises of each, while he himself had a house at Norwood. He was in the habit of travelling between London and Brighton with a second-class season ticket, and on Thursday nights invariably carried a large stock of valuable stones and other jewellery in his bag from the Brighton shop. He always left by the last train, got out at Norwood, and took his bag on to London the next morning.

"Well, a couple of blackguards got wind of his movements, and determined to rob him. Their plan was this. One of them hired a trap and waited near Hassocks station, while the other was to get in with Buxton at Preston Park, *if* he were alone, and chloroform and rob him between that station and Hassocks, then jump out when the train stopped and make for the trap. Twice an attempt was made, but each time Buxton was not alone. The third time, however, there was no obstacle."

"And was he robbed?" we asked.

"Worse than that," replied Wingrave. "When he was attacked by the other he made a most desperate resistance, and the end of it was that there was a knife drawn, and poor Buxton was stabbed in the heart—the affair happened in the Hassocks tunnel. Well, the murderer propped him up in the corner of the carriage, got out at Hassocks, found his friend waiting with the trap close by, and the two of them drove off furiously,

while the body went on to London Bridge before they discovered that the old man was dead."

"And is that *all?*" said the Doctor.

"Oh, dear no. Don't you know the sequel? But there, I forgot you were all three so densely ignorant about such a well-known thing. Why, the murderer himself was killed within twenty minutes of the death of his victim."

"How?"

"The horse shied at a sign post or something and upset the trap. The murderer was thrown out and broke his neck instantly, while his confederate was badly hurt. It was through the latter that the whole affair became known."

"What a ghostly story," said the Artist as Wingrave slowly filled and lit his pipe. "But what about the locking of that carriage door? What has that to do with it?"

"Ah, that's the sequel. And a very curious thing it is," he replied. "Ever since the affair happened there's been a difficulty about the second-class compartment nearest the engine on that train, until for some time past now, no one is permitted to enter it until the train gets to Hassocks."

"But what *is* the difficulty?" asked the Doctor.

"Why, people who travelled in it used to complain of all sorts of things which happened between Preston Park and Hassocks. Several times ladies travelling alone were found in a dead faint and afterwards declared that they had seen two men scuffling in the carriage. Sometimes a hideous shriek would be heard, and once or twice the train was stopped by some frightened passenger pulling the electric alarm. So at last it was determined to keep the door locked, as I've said before."

"But surely," I said, "they don't run the very same carriage in which the fellow was murdered every night and in the same position, do they?"

"No, and that's just the curious part of it. It doesn't matter *what* carriages they put on, or how they arrange them. The second-class compartment *nearest the engine* always gives them trouble unless they lock it."

"Well, and is *that* all?" said the Doctor with a tinge of scepticism in his tone of voice.

"No, there's something more. Every night just after the train gets to Hassocks Station a horse and trap are distinctly heard galloping along the road."

"Gammon!" said the Doctor.

"They *are*, I tell you. Why, every farmer in the place knows about it, and if one of them happens to be driving on the road near the station when that train comes in, he'll jump down at once and hold his horse's head."

"Why?"

"Why? Because haven't I *told* you a horse and trap are heard directly afterwards? And horses that this sound passes have been known to bolt from fright."

"I should like to have this story corroborated," said the Artist.

"So you can; it's easy enough. Anyone at Hassocks Station will tell you. Why don't you write to the station master? He'll be able to give you fuller details than I can."

"Look here," ejaculated the Doctor. "Do you mean to say you believe all this?"

"My dear fellow," replied Wingrave, "I've just told you the facts of the case as I heard them. I don't pretend to offer an explanation. I only told you of a most remarkable circumstance, and, as I said a moment ago, you can easily get the story corroborated if you want to."

* * * * *

That story interested me so much that I thought about it all the next day, and finally determined to try and get some further information. So I wrote and sent a letter directed to—

The Station Master,
Hassocks Station,
Hassocks,

detailing what I knew of the case, and asking him to supply me with further particulars.

The "further particulars" arrived by return of post, and were as follows:

Hassocks Station, December 9th, 1896.

Dear Sir,—In answer to your letter I beg to state that I know nothing whatever about the matter you mention. No carriage arrives here locked from Brighton, and no sounds as of a horse and trap are heard. Neither was there, to my knowledge, any such murder committed. I might mention that I have to-day received two other letters asking for information on the same subject.—Yours faithfully, J. Clarke,
Station Master.

"Sold!" I ejaculated, as I put on my hat and started for the Doctor's. On my way I met the Artist.

"Have you had a letter from the station master at Hassocks?" I asked.

"What! Have *you* been made a fool of too?" he growled.

"Just so. But come on. I'm going to see the Doctor."

We found him at home, and as we entered the room he tried to hide an official-looking letter laying on the table.

"All right!" we cried, "you needn't put that out of sight. We've both got one like it. Quite a job for the station——"

"Oh, shut up, do! So *you're* both sold as well. That's one consolation."

And now we keep studiously off the subject of ghosts when that arch-inventor, Wingrave, appears, while if he dares to mention a railway carriage, or the station master at Hassocks, or anything approaching the subject of that terrible "sell" of his, we take up the nearest thing to throw at him, and he has to fly for his life!

Victor Lorenzo Whitechurch.

A STORY WITHOUT WORDS.

£10 in Prizes.

On page 156 four sketches are given in their proper order. £5 is offered to the reader who sends us the most appropriate wording to go under each sketch, the whole to form a story descriptive of the illustrations, and £1 will be given to each of the senders of the next best five attempts. These competitions will alternate with the Jumbled Story competitions, at all events for a time.

It is not necessary for competitors to have any literary ability. If you have a good idea, surely there should be no difficulty in putting it down in words. The whole of the story is limited to one hundred words, which may be distributed under the sketches according to the judgment of the competitor.

All that you have to do is to write in the order of the sketches the wording that you think most appropriate, inclose your attempt in an envelope (which should be marked "Picture Story"), and forward it to this office before Monday, February 8th.

THE QUEEN AGAINST OWEN.

By **ALLEN UPWARD**, *Author of "Secrets of the Courts of Europe," "The Prince of Balkistan," etc., etc.*

CHAPTER IX.

The Judge.

When evidence is called on behalf of the prisoner, counsel for the prosecution enjoys the right of reply. This right young Pollard rose to exercise, and, as is often the case with beginners at the Bar, he did much better as a speaker than he had done as an examiner.

As soon as he was fairly on his feet, his leader came into court and took his seat. The other case in which he had been engaged had come to an end shortly before this, but Prescott had purposely lingered outside, so as to avoid the duty of replying, which would have been assigned to him had he returned in time. As he had heard nothing of the case, nor of Tressamer's defence, the course he adopted was the best even for the interests of the prosecution—in fact, it was the course usually followed under parallel circumstances.

The first part of Pollard's reply was simply a recapitulation of the evidence. Afterwards he made an attempt to answer the attack on Lewis.

"Gentlemen," he said, "my learned friend has practically charged Mr. Lewis with this murder. On what grounds has he done so? What evidence has he brought against Mr. Lewis? Mr. Lewis is the heir of the deceased, it is true, but then he is her nephew. When he came back from Australia, he went at once to see her. He has told you, in answer to my questions, that this was out of gratitude to her for her kindness to him when he was a young man. There is nothing suspicious, therefore, in his going to her before his sister, who lived in the North of England, moreover, probably a long way off.

"Then my learned friend has laid stress on the fact that this crime occurred the night of his arrival. But I submit, gentlemen, that it would have been more natural if he had abstained from it the first night, and done it some time after, if he did it at all. I might suggest to you that the prisoner did it the night Mr. Lewis arrived on purpose to throw suspicion on him."

And so on. Finally he closed in a form of words which even the most inexperienced prosecutor has by heart.

"In conclusion, gentlemen, I ask you to banish from your minds every trace of prejudice, and to forget everything which you have read elsewhere about this case, and to determine it solely on what has passed here to-day. If the evidence you have heard leaves a fair and reasonable doubt in your minds as to the prisoner's guilt, no doubt you will acquit her; but if that evidence is so strong and convincing that you are morally satisfied that the deceased woman met her death at the prisoner's hands, then it is your duty to return a verdict of guilty."

With this he sat down, and his brother leant over and congratulated him, while the other solicitors began to consider whether there might not be something in the young man after all.

And now it was Sir Daniel Buller's turn, and all eyes were directed upon him as he settled himself in his chair, with his face towards the jury, who strove to catch his lordship's eye, and conveyed as much appreciation as possible into their faces.

"Gentlemen of the jury, it now becomes my duty to recall your attention to the facts of this case, and to give you what assistance I can towards finding your verdict. You have been told by counsel on both sides that this is a grave and important case. Gentlemen, every case which comes before a criminal court is grave and important. In this case, it is true, the life of a fellow-creature is at stake; but that consideration ought not to affect you one way or the other in bringing to bear upon the evidence before you that impartiality and cautious discrimination which it is the duty of a jury to apply indifferently to every matter that may come before them."

A slight sensation of relief in the jury-box. Among the audience an impression that his lordship is going against the prisoner.

"The duties of a jury in a case like this are exceedingly simple, but perhaps it may be advisable that I should briefly remind you in what they consist. And, first of all, it is, I am sure, unnecessary for me to insist on the absolute necessity of your resolutely putting out of your minds every particle of knowledge, and every impression of whatever kind, which you may have collected in regard to this case from sources external to the inquiry conducted here to-day. It is, I feel, equally superfluous for me to caution you against attaching the smallest weight to any evidence which I was compelled in the course of this case to exclude. The law of evidence is the accumulated experience of the ablest intellects that have adorned the Bench of which I am so unworthy an occupant." (Strong impulse on part of jury to murmur "No," manfully suppressed.) "And, in applying it, I can only say that I have never personally laboured under any hesitation as to its general soundness, though I may occasionally doubt as to its applicability to particular instances.

"You will remember that allusion was made by the prosecution in their opening to the supposed existence of certain valuables, the property of the deceased. It is my duty to tell you, speaking as judge in this case, with all the evidence before me, that there is not sufficient evidence that any such valuables were in the deceased's possession at the time when she came to her unhappy end, and that in any case there is not a particle of evidence that the prisoner had ever heard, or was even remotely aware, of the existence of the articles in question.

"Whether they were there or no is, of course, immaterial to the case. The jeweller, whose name, I believe, was John—Thomas—no——"

"William Williams, my lord," called out Pollard.

"Ah, thank you, Mr. Pollard! But it is of no consequence, because, as I am explaining to you, gentlemen, his evidence really ought not to affect your minds one way or the other. Even if deceased bought these things, there is no evidence that she kept them by her. She may have disposed of them in some manner of which we know nothing. The fact that they have been missing since her decease affords in itself some ground for supposing that she did so part with the control over this property. But, as I must repeat, what became of it is perfectly immaterial, because there is absolutely nothing in the whole of the evidence before us, and by which we must be guided, to fix the prisoner with knowledge that these valuables existed at all.

"You will observe, gentlemen, how important this becomes when we come to consider the question of motive. I agree with Mr. Tressamer, about whose general line of defence I shall have something to say presently"—(Tressamer frowned; the rest of the Bar looked nervous)—"in saying that the apparent absence of motive is the most inexplicable feature in the case for the prosecution. You will, of course, have fresh in your minds the evidence of the servant on this point." (The jury found it quite

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hopeless to even pretend that they had anything of the sort.) "I refer to her statement, which I will read to you presently"—(visible depression in the jury-box and throughout the court)—"that deceased promised the prisoner on one occasion to leave her a legacy, or something of the sort. Gentlemen, that is peculiarly and emphatically a matter for you to deal with, and on which it would be out of place for me to offer you any guidance whatever." (Dismay among several jurymen; stolid pride among others.) "If you believe that evidence—and I confess I am wholly unable to follow the prisoner's counsel in some of his comments upon the general demeanour of the witnesses, most of whom appeared to me to give their evidence with every appearance of impartiality, and in a manner which showed that they realised their responsibility—but all that, again, is rather a matter for you than for me—if, I say, you believe that evidence as to the legacy, you must consider for yourselves what weight you ought fairly to attach to it, and how far in your opinion it furnishes a motive adequate to inspire the very heinous crime into which we are now inquiring."

The jury by this time were fairly at sea. They could not for the life of them make out which side his lordship was taking, and, of course, it never once occurred to them that he was trying to avoid taking any side at all.

"And now, gentlemen, to consider the evidence against the prisoner more in detail." (Suppressed sighs from the gentlemen.) "This is one of those cases which depend entirely on what is commonly known as circumstantial evidence. Well, gentlemen, the evidence of circumstances is just as good as any other evidence, and very often it is far more reliable and far less subject to be vitiated by improper influences than ocular and oral testimony. In cases of this kind it is seldom that we can get anything but circumstantial evidence. When a man is going to do a wicked and criminal act he does not call witnesses around him. No, he avoids all human sight, he perpetrates his deed in secrecy, and all that we can do is to seek to penetrate the mystery by such means as are at our disposal."

Impression confirmed that judge is against the prisoner. Tressamer looking slightly anxious.

"The question for us, therefore, or rather for you, gentlemen" (the jury look important), "is not whether the evidence is circumstantial or not, but whether it is sufficient to convict the prisoner. Sufficient, that is, in your opinion, as men of intelligence and firmness, bringing to bear on this case the same qualities of mind which you bring to bear from day to day upon your ordinary avocations, whatever those may be. That the evidence is sufficient in law I am reluctantly compelled to decide. Whether the court which deals with points of this description will confirm my judgment or overrule it I cannot say. In the meantime, you must take it from me that you are legally justified in convicting the prisoner. Whether you are really justified on the facts is, of course, a very different question."

Impression among many that judge is going for acquittal. Jury still in doubt.

"This is one of those cases which make a judge congratulate himself on the existence of trial by jury. It is one of those peculiarly difficult cases in which the mind is perplexed between its desire to mete out punishment for a singularly atrocious crime, and its inability to disentangle the knotted skein of mystery which shrouds the whole circumstances of the affair. I rejoice unaffectedly that the responsibility of discharging this delicate and dangerous task is thrown, not upon my shoulders, but upon yours."

Undisguised dismay of jury. They cast appealing looks round the court and meet nothing but contempt. The general feeling is now that the judge is in the prisoner's favour. By this time the majority of those present share the same view.

Then Sir Daniel proceeded to go into the evidence at great length, reading passages here and there from his notes. When he came to the evidence of the servant Rees, he threw out a suggestion which struck doubt into many a mind which had till then believed in the prisoner's innocence.

"A very great deal in this case undoubtedly turns on this evidence as to footsteps. You may, I think, take it as admitted on all hands, by the prisoner's counsel as well as by the prosecution, that the witness is correct in saying that she heard the prisoner leave the house. That she recognised her walk correctly that time there can be no manner of doubt. Then we come to the second time, when she heard footsteps ascending the stairs. And I may pause here to remark that I think a quite exaggerated importance has been attached to the discrepancy between the witness's ideas of time and the correct idea. Gentlemen, we should all of us fail if we strove to indicate with accuracy the length of a given interval of time. We use the expressions 'five minutes' and 'ten minutes' in ordinary conversation, without attaching any very definite meaning to them, and, therefore, I cannot see that the witness is in any way discredited if she mistook a period of three minutes for one of ten, or *vice versâ*."

The jury nodded approval. Now they were on firm ground.

"But it is her answer to Mr. Pollard, when he asked her as to the second set of footsteps, that I wish to draw your attention to. She said, as I took it, 'I did not notice them,' —that is, the footsteps—'but I think they must have been Miss Owen's, or else I should have noticed the difference.' Now, I think you will see the importance of that." (The jury try to see it, and, failing in that, try to look as if they saw it, and fail a second time.) "Remember, the state of things is this: the witness is wide awake; she has just been down to the front door and up again, and ten minutes after, or three minutes only according to Mr. Tressamer, she hears someone come in and walk upstairs. Now, gentlemen, under those circumstances one would naturally expect the witness to be on the alert to distinguish any difference, if difference there were, between the footsteps. And if the person entering the second time were not the prisoner, to whose tread she was accustomed, and which she was expecting to hear, but if it were someone else—a man, let us say, with an entirely different tread, and a tread to which she was wholly unaccustomed—I say one would naturally expect the witness to note the difference instantly, to wonder who it was that had entered, to feel alarm when she heard the unknown stranger proceeding upstairs and into the bedroom; and, in short, one would expect her to get up and rouse the whole household to discover the robber, as she would naturally assume him to be."

The jury were much impressed. A feeling of gravity spread all over the court. In the prisoner's mind there was a sensation as if the sun had retired behind a cloud, leaving a leaden atmosphere all round her.

"Leaving you to attach much or little importance, as you please, to that observation" (jury puzzled again), "I will pass on to the point about which so much has been said—namely, the latch." (Jury bend forward with straining ears. They have felt this to be the difficulty all along, and are anxiously desiring to be told what it all means, and what bearing it has on the case.) "This latch, or rather lock, appears to have been of peculiar, though not unusual, construction. As you doubtless know, gentlemen, locks do differ very much from one another, and it is essential to their usefulness that they should do so. If all the locks on our doors were of the same pattern, one key would open them all, and consequently the locks would be rendered useless for the purpose for which they were designed. In ancient times, before such articles had come into common use, it was no doubt the custom to have a rude species of door-fastening, calculated rather to keep the door fixed in its place as against the violence of the weather, than to furnish any obstacle against the ingress of undesired visitors. But, gentlemen, we are not living in those times, but in our own; and we are here to administer justice, not

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with regard to the ideas prevalent among our remote ancestors, but with regard to the ordinary and reasonable practices of everyday life around us."

This last part appeals to the jury. They nod their heads in approval, and wait for further enlightenment.

"Law, gentlemen, it has often been said, is common-sense; and though there may be a sense in which that maxim is not strictly verifiable, yet in a broad and general way its applicability has never been and cannot be disputed. And, therefore, gentlemen, your common-sense will agree with me when I say that it is a lawful presumption—a presumption which the law warrants you in drawing and in holding till you have some satisfactory evidence to rebut it—that the person who obtains access to a house or any other building secured by a lock of this description must have in his or her possession a key which is capable of opening that lock."

Continued approval of the jury. They find his lordship a little tedious perhaps, but sound. At last there seems a fair prospect of light being thrown upon the case.

"Now, that there were in existence keys which fitted this particular lock cannot, I think, be seriously doubted by anyone who has listened carefully to the evidence which has been put forward both by the prosecution and by the defence in this case." (Gratification of jury. How simple it all seems when a master-mind is at work upon the apparent mystery!) "The only question left for you to decide, so far as I can discover, and if I am wrong it is not for want of careful consideration, is this: whether, on that night into which we are inquiring, the prisoner had or had not a latchkey, and, if so, whether she used it, and in either case, whether any other person had a similar key, which he also employed in opening the door of this house." (Jury getting slightly fogged again. But they no longer sorrow as one who hath no hope. They rely on his lordship to pull them through.)

"It is perhaps a circumstance worth noting, though the explanation may be very simple, that neither side has produced a latchkey purporting to be one of those belonging to the latch in question." (The explanation *was* simple. Neither side had thought of it.) "But in the absence of any ocular demonstration one way or the other, we are, I think, justified in assuming that the keys in question were small, portable articles, such as could conveniently be carried in the pocket. In saying this I merely appeal to your own experience as men of business and householders, who are most of you probably in the constant habit of carrying articles of this kind yourselves." (Jury in smooth water again. How could they ever have thought this matter presented difficulties?) "There, gentlemen, I must leave you. I can throw no further light upon the hidden circumstances of that night, and must leave you to decide for yourselves on a calm and deliberate review of the evidence whether, in your opinion, such a key as I have indicated was, or was not, in the possession of the prisoner at the bar, or of any other individual whose name has or has not transpired in the course of this trial, and if so, whether the prisoner, or that other person, or both of them, did or did not obtain access to the house by means of that nature."

Collapse of jury. Dashed in a moment from their height of fancied security, they lay helpless at the bottom of the abyss.

The summing-up was nearly over. Tressamer had begun to hope the judge had forgotten him. But Sir Daniel had reserved his melodramatic effects to the last, as all orators know they ought to do.

"And now a few words as to the unusual, I may say, I hope, the extraordinary, though unhappily not quite unprecedented, line of defence which has been adopted in this case. The prisoner's counsel has not contented himself with merely defending the prisoner, he has gone far beyond that, far beyond the necessities, so far as they present themselves to my mind, of his position, and has distinctly and deliberately brought an accusation against one who is not on trial before you, and has, therefore, no means of rebutting the attack. For such a course there is, in my opinion, not a shadow of excuse. I have listened with great patience to the evidence in this case from the beginning to the end, and I have not detected anywhere anything that casts one particle of suspicion upon Mr. Lewis.

"He was attacked for having come so promptly to visit his relative on his return. But his explanation was straightforward, and such as to commend itself to everyone who heard him. I shall not trouble you with any defence of Mr. Lewis, however"—(gratitude of the whole court)—"but I must condemn in the gravest and strongest manner the way in which Mr. Tressamer has abused his privilege as an advocate to spring a charge of this deadly character upon one who is, so far as we can see, a perfectly innocent man. If this sort of thing is to be indulged in, the honour of the Bar—that noble profession to which it is my glory to have belonged—will be dragged in the dust and its formidable immunities will have to be sharply and summarily curtailed. It has been well said that no assassin is so terrible to the community as the assassin of reputations, and in my opinion the man who is capable of taking advantage of a technical immunity from punishment to lie in wait for and destroy in cold blood the whole character and career of another, reveals a blackness of disposition which fits him for the commission of any crime, aye, though it were as heinous as that of which he has accused his victim."

It was a crushing rebuke. The crowded Bar turned and looked at their comrade as though they expected him to sink through the floor. But he sat pale and rigid, tearing off the feather of a quill with his teeth, but showing no other sign that he had heard the Judge.

"It is the prisoner who must suffer most by such a line of defence." (Here Eleanor looked up suddenly, as if she had only just begun to pay attention to what was going on.) "Its natural effect on your minds must be to induce you to ask yourselves not the real question before you, namely, is Eleanor Owen guilty or not? but this other question: which is guilty, Eleanor Owen or John Lewis? And to that you could, as conscientious men, give only one answer.

"But that is what I want, if possible, to avoid. My principal reason for making the remarks I have made about Mr. Tressamer's speech is that I do not want you to confuse the issues, as he has confused them, but to return your verdict freely and impartially, having regard solely to the bearing of the evidence which has been given upon the guilt or innocence of the prisoner."

Here his lordship abruptly came to an end, just when the long-suffering jury were expecting that he was at last going to give them a hint as to his own leaning in the case.

It was now the part of the clerk of arraigns to rise and request the jury to consider their verdict. But that functionary had taken advantage of the charge to fall into a light and pleasant slumber, from which it became necessary to rouse him. One of the Bar, therefore, put out his hand and pulled the clerk of arraigns by the sleeve. He started awake, and, hastily stumbling to his feet, looked wildly round for information.

The day before this incident would have provoked mirth. To-day it caused nothing but impatient annoyance, except to a few junior barristers, who thought it professional to show callous indifference to what was going on. At last, however, the clerk of arraigns was made to realise what stage had been reached, and he called the bailiff of the court and gave the jury over to his charge, with the following form of words:

"You shall take this jury to some convenient place, where you shall lock them up without meat, fire, or light; you shall suffer no man to speak to them, neither shall you speak to them yourself, except to ask them if they have agreed upon their verdict; so help you God."

The oath was taken, and the twelve men filed slowly out.

(To be continued.)

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WHAT COMES OUT OF THE GRASS.

AN extraordinary man was Joshua Key—ugly, deformed and morose; long, lank, and bony; narrow in his shoulders, and hollow in the chest. His arms were long and skinny, and his head, clad by a thin, strange-coloured hair, was pear-shaped, narrow at the jaw, and massive at the forehead. His brows were hairless, and his pointed chin and sunken cheeks bore not a trace of beard. Two little dark eyes, restless and dilating, flashed beneath his hairless brows. His arms were strangely long, and reached, as they fell to his side, the bony knee of his short leg. Yet, despite his deformities, he was graceful in all his movements, which were slow and indolent.

The life and soul of the man lived in his eyes; they never ceased flashing. Roving or fixed they flashed the light of anger.

The manner of this man was strange, and his surroundings weird, uncanny. He spent the main part of his days up in the low, dark loft, which, by a long window, overlooked the marsh and swampy moorland that stretched some miles away from the rising ground upon which the dilapidated house stood.

This loft, with its thickly-sanded floor, with the withered bush and bramble that stood heaped in every corner, with its common deal table under the window, and its low milking stool, was Joshua Key's retreat, Joshua Key's monastery; and the graceful, coiling creatures that entwined themselves round the stems and boughs of the bramble, or lay coiled up in the corners of the long glass cases arranged round the room, were his idols. He loved those creeping, curling, wriggling, rearing snakes. He loved them, as we love at twenty, with a silent, pitiful, melancholy adoration, when a glance of recognition quickens the pulse, and brings the hot blood tingling to our ears.

He was pleased to lie upon the sanded floor and watch their movements as they curved their way towards him and pressed their little black noses against the plate glass cases, or as they turned and twisted their graceful, supple bodies around some branch of bramble, and, swaying to and fro, spat out their tongues as if to mock him. For hours he would lie prostrate upon the floor, and imitate the motions of their heads, fixing his round, black eyes on theirs, and spit as they spat, hiss as they hissed.

Or he would while away his day sitting on his milking stool before a boa-constrictor's cage, and imitate the serpent's mode of rearing; contracting his body, and swaying to and fro; then elongating himself, and twisting his head quickly to the right, to the left, and fixing his eyes upon some object, thrust out his tongue, ten, twenty, thirty times in rapid succession.

Hours he would while away in such a manner; days he would stay shut up in that dark, low loft, living upon biscuits, and the raw flesh of rabbits and pigeons, which, anon, he flung to his vipers, and a few stray leaves of a lettuce's heart. He was dead to the world, but most of all to the fair-haired girl in the room below his loft, the girl who bore his name, and called him husband, master.

She was a fair young girl, with a thin, pale face that had been beautiful. Deep, dark lines in her cheeks, once so plump and rosy, marked the dry courses where tears of bitter disappointment had so often flowed. All that remained of her early beauty was the cloud of soft brown hair that loosely fell upon her shoulders.

She was alone! alone, save for Joshua her husband, and Donald, the old male help who made pretence to do her bidding. No other voice than Donald's would ever reach her ears, unless it was the chattering babble of some smiling child, whose prattle the low wind carried across the moor from the rising land beyond; for Joshua was as dumb as the dead.

She rarely saw her husband, moreover. Days often grew into weeks without her meeting him, and, per-adventure, when she chanced to meet him on the stairs, he would pass her by without a glance or sign of recognition, and wander out, and down to the marsh-land, where he would stay until the white mist rose, and the sky grew dark. But sometimes he would meet her and, seeing, would silently and indolently take her into his long arms, and press his thin, bloodless lips to hers—and hasten. Sometimes she would find her solitude insufferable, and call for Donald, to ask him something, that she might feel the strange sensation of hearing a human voice. But Donald was generally as dumb as his master; he would hearken to her calling without responding, and she would call in vain, and call again, in loud tones that struck strange terror into her sad young heart, when she would seek her bed-chamber to bury her face in the pillows, and sob herself into the oblivion of sleep.

One day she sat alone in her room, gazing out of the window at the thin white mist that hung on the marsh-land, grey in the evening light. She was asking herself, as she did a score of times each day, why she had allowed herself to leave her home of two years before, to plight her troth to a man she loved not; and she buried her face in her arms, and answered the stereotyped answer:

"It is in the power of his eyes!"

Therein lay the secret of her misery, and all that had led up to it. It was the power of Joshua Key's eyes that had fascinated her, and enticed her from her home. She had not strength to resist the influence of his glance. His will was her wish when their eyes met. He was her master, she his slave, and her impotence was a bondage and a bane. Early in her married life she had found her level, and had abandoned speculation upon her master's occupation in the room above her own. She knew his worship, and his idols, and was well contented with this but scanty knowledge.

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Sometimes she would hear him moving, and the creaking of the three-legged stool upon which he sat to mock the movements of the boa-constrictor; but she was now well used to it all, and it never set her wondering what he could be doing. She never dared to question him; indeed, during the whole two years they had been married she had only spoken seven slow words to him, —"Don't, don't look at me like that!" The thought of freeing herself by any means of the burden of her existence had never occurred to her. The question that ever filled her mind was as to how it would all end. It could not go on for ever, and yet it appeared to her impossible that it could ever end. The past two years had seemed to her a whole eternity. She could not conceive the end.

Her mind was full of the queries she set herself, as she sat at the window watching the curling mist upon the swamp grow thicker and greyer, as the daylight died behind the distant hills. How could it end? How would it end, if end it could?

A sudden terror seized her. She know not what there was in the sounds she heard in the room above to strike terror into her. She had heard many similar sounds which never had disturbed her. It was only as if some heavy body were dragging across the floor. That was all, and she knew not why it terrorised her. But it surely did.

She rose involuntarily from her seat and with a cat tread left the room and made her way up to the loft. Never had she seen inside this room. All that she knew she had learnt from Donald. And now the door of the loft stood ajar and she before it. But she hesitated. There was absolute silence within, and it filled her with an inexplicable dread. She dreaded to learn; she dreaded to see. But she dreaded the most to retreat in ignorance.

The sounds of dragging were renewed, and she hesitated no longer. One step, one motion of her arm, and the door stood open, and she within the loft.

Full length upon the floor, leaving a track behind him in the thickly strewn sand, lay Joshua Key, wriggling and creeping in the manner of the mode of progression of a snake. His long arms lay closely at his side, and his legs together. His head was raised, and his small black eyes flashed fire incessantly. He had wriggled on his stomach from the farther corner of the loft, and was creeping gradually towards the door. Nearer and nearer—then his flashing eyes caught hers, and he stopped and fixed his glance unfalteringly upon her. She stood transfixed. She neither moved nor spoke, but her breath was hard and heavy, and her body swayed to and fro like a poplar under a heavy breeze.

* * * * *

She lay upon her bed, and Donald was chafing her cold, white hands. In an instant she recollected.

"Did I faint, dear Donald?" she murmured.

Donald nodded, and then left her.

Afterwards, a hundred times a day, she went all over that scene again. And yet she never anticipated how it would end.

* * * * *

The day had been warm, but now a doubly-heavy mist hung over the swamp, and gave a grey-blue light to the long grass and rushes that flourished to hide the bog. Still, Joshua Key's wife sat out in the damp, cold air, which clung round her like a moistened cloak. A book lay in her lap. Her eyes wandered from her book to the strip of neglected ground that stretched from the house down to the reeds and rushes bordering in a thick band the vast swamp. Then her eyes traversed the swamp, and rested upon the blue-black peaks that rose in the far distance above the mists and plain. Not a sound disturbed the air; not a human figure lent a vestige of animation to the melancholy scene for as far as the eye could reach. The only moving object was the blue-grey mist, which rose and fell, in curves and clouds, as each soft rain-breeze swept across the swamp.

She let her head rest back upon the peeling wall of the house, and fixed her eyes upon the sky. The clouds were dark and lowering. There would be rain in the night, she thought, and the swamp would rise and encroach upon the bordering land.

The air was growing colder, damper. She felt it touch her skin, and shivered. She felt the moisture on her hand and cheek. A feeling of unrest, as though some magnetic influence was at work upon her, but too impotent to move her, crept over her. She moved restlessly, and watched the curling mist as it rose and fell.

Her husband was down there, she recollected. Her lord and master, and her king, was wading in the marsh and bog, among the tall green grass and heavy-headed rushes, seeking a snake that had escaped.

The feeling of unrest grew stronger. She felt more distinctly from whence the magnet worked, down in the marsh, among the stagnant pools and waving reeds. It moved her now. It drew her eyes, it moved her limbs, and she saw where marsh and meadow met, reeds angrily dividing, as if some creeping creature was through them making way towards her. She watched the tall grass tremble as the creeper crept along, which clearly showed the course the creeper took. She took two steps towards the marsh, and stopped. What could it mean? What could it be? The movement of the grass was such as might have been caused by the travelling of a snake.

An irresistible force seized her, and dragged her down to the marsh. It took her without her wish or will towards the spot where the mysterious creeper would emerge from the reeds.

Her eyes grew heavy, her pulse grew slack. Yet she still saw the trembling of the grass. Nearer and nearer to herself it trembled. Nearer and nearer she approached the edge. She reached it, and the reeds and grass, and the extreme border of the marsh, trembled, snapped, and fell before the prostrate form of Joshua Key.

He was clad in a long, black, and slimy waterproof. His arms lay closely to his sides, and his head was bare.

As he emerged from the long grass, he raised his head and stopped. His eyes met those of his wife, and blazed with the light of fury.

Slowly, with snake-like grace of movement, he crawled up to her, and raised himself to his feet. She neither moved nor trembled, but let him entwine his long, thin arms around her neck, and press his lips to hers. With supernatural strength, he pressed her lips, forcing her head back—back further, until something snapped, as the reeds had done, under his weight. He let his arms relax. She fell. He crouched upon the ground, and crept back into the reeds. On and on through the path he had made in coming. On and on till he sank exhausted in a stagnant pool.

That night rain fell for hours, and the waters of the swamp rose two feet.

C. RANDOLPH LICHFIELD.

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A STORY WITHOUT WORDS.—No. 2.

SEE PAGE 150.

OR,

The Romance of a Lost Continent.

By **Geo. C. Wallis**, Author of *The Winning of Gunhild*, etc.

CHAPTER XXX.

ON THE SHORE OF THE SHADOWS.

Two days I sat mourning over the body, speechless as a marble statue, taking little nourishment, save scanty drinks of water from the ample store in the boat, and anon gazing fixedly at the waste of water tossing outside the massive tower; after which time I roused myself, though every movement caused my wounds to gape and pain afresh, and with much labour got the boat with its melancholy freight inside the sheltering building.

Then I drew the sail-cloth from the body, and bound it up again with care, as it is the custom to bind the dead, smoothing the white robe, stroking the calm, lovely face, arranging the locks of raven hair. Then I secured a Passport Coin within her hand, according to her last wish, and next laid my beloved sword, my "Sunderer," upon her breast, encased still in its jewelled sheath, and cleaned and brightened as though fresh from its maker's forge.

"Lie there, good sword," I said. "Thy work is done now thy master's love is gone; and none shall use thee now that I have no more need!"

So I bound the two together, and after imprinting a lingering kiss upon the cold lips of the dead, bore my sorrowful burden down the winding stairs till I came to where the sea in the lower stories stopped me, and there, weighting the shrouded figure, consigned it with a bitter heart to the still, black water, watching the ripples and bubbles on the surface as it sank down—down—to where the form of little Didron already lay.

"Farewell, sweet wife!" I cried aloud in the gruesome silence, the words echoing dismally in the solitary place; "farewell. Thy Arnon will be with thee soon."

And the emptiness replied: "Will be with thee soon."

Then I crept back up the stairs and sat down on the highest floor, weary and forlorn, for it is a sad thing to bury your own dead, with your own hands to place them in the grave from whence none return. In the misery of my soul I strove to curse the gods, but my lips grew feeble and my courage failed, so that I dare not, and sat alone in silence, grieving, wishing that I had never been born. At last sleep, long delayed sleep, pressed down my eyelids, and overcome with weakness and fatigue I succumbed to its subtle, healing influence, waking not till the sun had set and risen and was near to setting again.

I was refreshed then, and in less pain and strangely calm in mind, though grief weighed upon my heart heavily as a load of lead. I parcelled out my store of food and measured my quantity of water, finding that the first would last me for some months and the latter but a few weeks. However, I knew that the season of storm and rain was coming on, when I could collect sufficient water in the channels of the tower top, and with my spear and sling I could obtain fish and bird whenever my supply should fail.

Whilst searching the deserted chambers I found some writing tools, and many sheets of prepared parchment, which had been reserved for State Rolls and priests' sayings, and the fancy seized me to beguile my solitary lot with setting down the thoughts and doings of my wandering life. I welcomed the sudden inspiration with avidity, for something I must do if I did not mean to go distraught, and so, after nursing my wounds till I could sit to the wooden bench with ease, began to write this strange and stormy history.

Having plenty of oil in my lamps, I started towards the even of a lowering day, the style and method of my writing

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coming to me in a flash of thought as I gazed out upon the desolate expanse of sea.

As though to mock me, the land had risen again somewhat, so that the heaped-up wreck of the many buildings of Kronos formed a sunken reef at the mouth of a new bay which extended over the lower part of the city, and the blackened shores of this bay, mere reefs in themselves, were awash with the billows at high tide.

Here and there some pile of masonry projected from the surface, and right in the midst of the shallow inlet a single granite column rose defiantly from the waters—a melancholy memory of the Temple of the Three Spirits.

As the darkness of the even grew, the promise of wild weather was well fulfilled; the surf broke heavily upon the sullen shores and curled in a foaming ridge above the buried bar, the seamews screamed, the gale howled fiercely round the massive tower.

A few tattered clouds sped swiftly under the stars, and away in the south the lightning forked across the sky.

I seized my writing tools in haste and began; my hand hurried over the pages, and the spirit of the storm spoke in the written words. I wrote on swiftly, heedlessly, far into the wild, wet night, nor rested from my labour till the story was so well begun that I knew I could set it down to the end. To the blinding glare of lightning, the deafening roar of thunder, and the angry dashing of the billows on the mighty tower, I wrote on, living over my youth again, and when I laid the sheets aside, the sun was glowing in the hazy east like a ball of fire.

So day by day I took up the long story, writing out of the sincerity of my heart, omitting nothing, not sparing myself, nor avoiding my weaknesses in the least, and growing to like the task until I came to tell of where I first met Briseis in that well-remembered garden.

Then my hand trembled, refusing to proceed, and my sorrow burst forth anew. For a week the parchment lay untouched, and I paced the stony floor with gnawing misery eating into my very soul.

The strain grew great. The solitude, the lack of a cheering voice or a friendly face, was getting too much for me to bear, when I recollected my skill in preparing noxious draughts that I had when a priest in the Land of Khem.

"Ha! ha!" laughed I, with bitter mirth, "'twas not in vain old Mitres taught me the mixing of the poison cups which stood in the sacred parts of the temple of Karnac for the punishment of desecrators! 'Twas not in vain, I swear!"

So I compounded a deadly draught from the infusion of many dried herbs that were stored in the tower; a cupful of poison running over; a measure of dark-brown liquid, full of the death that is the beginning of a new life; and, placing it on the bench before me, sat down with a feeling of reckless defiance of all the powers that be.

"Soon, Briseis, I shall be with thee," I said, "for when the sun goes down I shall drink this cup and set my spirit free!"

Patiently I waited, with the Passport Piece bound tightly in my hand, till the light of day dipped slowly in the sea, casting a softened twilight glow over all the scene, most pleasing to the senses after the scorching glare of a tropic moon. Then I seized the fatal cup, and crying:

"Health to thee, Amarunth, great god of death!" raised it towards my lips.

But ere they touched the noxious liquor a shadow passed before my eyes, and a sweet voice whispered in my ear:

"Stay!"

I looked up, and at what I saw dashed the cup upon the stony floor, shattering it to fragments, and spilling the contents at my feet. It was the shade of my Briseis—nay, it was herself in very truth who stayed my hand and drove the fierce despair from out my soul with one beseeching glance of her endearing eyes!

I was not alarmed nor felt a great surprise, being so full of the thought of my beloved that her appearance fell in with the humour of my mind, and I sat regarding her beauteous figure—which shone faintly luminous in the deepening dusk—with admiration and content. She was clad much as in life, and upon her head was twined a spray of berries, like those of the mountain ash, only that each berry glittered in the shade as a diamond of the purest water. After the first glance she looked at me no more, standing with downcast eyes till I spoke.

"Briseis," I said, breathing softly lest I should dispel the vision, "why keep me from thee longer?"

"For thine own good, my Arnon," she replied. "Knowest not that 'tis written in the Book of the Soul: *'Let him who would forestall the hand of Destiny take heed for himself, lest he find not for ever the peace that his soul craveth?'*"

"Ay, I know it," I answered, "but solitude and anguish hath unsettled my reason."

"Wherefore I came to save thee from thyself," the shade of Briseis made reply; "for I saw thy mad intent, and would not have it so. Think not I have forgotten thee," and she looked upon me with the old bewitching tenderness.

"Do the spirits, then, see all that happens to those left in the flesh?" I asked inquisitively. "Have they power to appear and speak with whom they will?"

"Thou would fain know the secrets of the future, Arnon," she answered smiling, "and it is deemed that the message of the Book of the Soul is sufficient for the children of men."

"You may be," I intreated, loth to bate my curiosity. "There are some things thou couldst tell me of without angering the gods?"

She seemed to think in silence a moment, looking upwards, then answered me:

"Some inkling of the glory of the Garden of Joy and some forewarning of the Land of Shadows I can give thee. When thou diest, linger not in the murky vapours of the Shades, but press forward to the Light of the Spirit World, which shineth bright and constant as the evening star; press towards it heedless of the many luring lights that glimmer all ways through the gloom, for these latter are never still.

"The portal of the Garden is ever swinging slightly open for the faithful ones to enter in, and having found the Steadfast Star thou wilt see the way thereto clear before thy feet. The Warden of the Gate is an old man with a flowing beard and a grave, stern face, but his eyes are kindly, and the passers-in are welcomed with his blessing, giving him the Passport Pieces from their hands as they come. He straightway casteth down the coins upon the fertile soil, and from each piece there springeth up at once a lovely plant with a sweet-smelling flower. And the faithful enter in and wander in the Sacred Groves.

"Of the Garden I may not tell thee much, only saying that the beauty and the glory of it passeth all belief, and never palleth on the soul's most subtle sense. It is the dwelling of the Three Spirits which yet are one—the Great Eternal All-in-All, and the light of Their Presence shineth everywhere throughout the land—upon the waving trees, the gorgeous blossoms, the rippling brooks, and the tinkling waterfalls of the winding Stream of Peace; and the sound of Their Voices breathing words of love and rest is ever stealing through the Garden in the form of a whispering wind, fanning the bloom-laden branches of the avenues and rustling through the pliant rushes by the River's brink.

"One thing more I will tell thee and have done, and must be gone. They who choose rather to wait the coming of their beloved than to go forward alone into the full perfection that lieth far within, can rest near the Gate till their loved ones come. There is a great crowd waiting now, for many are they who would rather wait than proceed alone."

"And thou, Brisois?" I asked.

"I am one of those who wait," she said, "and our children also, with many other of thy friends. We shall rest by the Gate till thou hast passed the Golden Portal and we can go

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on together into the greater glory and the nearer presence of the All-in-All. And to comfort thee I say: thy waiting shall not be long, nor weary, and thy end shall be in the arms of the sea that thou lovest so well—maybe in thy hours of sleep. And now I leave thee till we meet beyond the Shadows."

Her glorious form grew fainter and more filmy and darkness deepened before my eyes. With a smile of love and half-regret the vision passed away.

Then I went to my writing again, plying my stylus on the smoothened sheets with fresh vigour and new inspiration. Hope, fair hope, now shone before my onward gaze, and calm assurance of the future took the place of a frenzied despair. The solitude grew less irksome, and the hours of sleep more welcome, and ever the echo of my beloved's words rang sweetly in my ears.

As I wrote, my loneliness seemed to pass away, and I felt as though I lived and moved in the scenes I depicted, heard and told the stories that I wrote, saw the friends and foes with whom my narrative is full.

Now I draw to the close of my task, and the written sheets lie curled in the copper wrapping ready to be sealed before I shut my lids in sleep. The sea has risen since I first began, at first slowly and then quickly, till it is awash with the floor on which my feet now rest—the highest floor of the great tower—and it may be this night or the next—who can tell?—when it will submerge the lofty summit itself, and I shall pass away in a rush of water to the great beyond.

So each night I seal up the writing before I lie upon the couch, thus knowing that 'twill last for ages till Destiny shall bring the hand to open it, and the eye to read its tale of wonder to a world which has forgotten that Atlantis ever was or deems the memory of it but an idle legend, idly told.

But the day of the end lingers, and every dawn I look out wistfully upon the great, glittering sea, thinking that I would fain once more be on its bosom with a good ship's timbers under me, and a gallant crew at my command, breasting its rolling billows, and its plunging storms; for in spite of the ruin it hath brought to Atlantis, and to me, I love the ocean still, knowing that 'tis but the instrument of the wisdom of the All-in-All.

I long once more to hear the curling of its creamy surges on the reefs and shallows of its island shores; to watch its mighty breakers bursting into foam upon its rocky coasts; to hear the distant booming of its tides upon its stony bars; to see the splashing of its wavelets on the shelving sands of little promontories, or the dewdrops of its high-flung spray upon the green fern-fronds of craggy tropic shores; to hear its rushing waters hurrying in tumults through inlets and deep channels; to hear or see it anywhere but here, in calm or storm; heaving restlessly beneath the deep, clear blue of a summer sky, or tossing in fury under the driven clouds of a winter's night; receiving gently the pattering fall of a steady shower, or raging fiercely to the glare of the lightning's flash and the roar of the thunder's roll.

But 'tis in vain: elsewhere than from this silent tower I have looked my last upon the foam-crested sea.

The end lingers, and though this even the water is creeping 'neath the door and darkening the stone flags, it rises but slowly. Still, a sense of something new to come is in my mind, intermingling with the ever-present thought and fond remembrance of my beloved Briseis, and her last appearance and message to me, and feel that soon, in the dim hours of night, I must put off from this misty shore. Sixty years I have lived; a life for the most part stormy; and now must meet my death forlorn, alone, untended, in the time of sleep.

But I fear it not, for I know that beyond the gloom of the Shadowland the light of the Spirit-world shines where the Gate of the Garden stands ajar, and 'tis only a step from the Golden Portal to the presence of my love.

THE END.

"The Last King of Atlantis"

has come to an end, and next week will appear the opening chapters of a new serial story by MR. CHARLES EDWARDES, entitled—

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RESULT OF JUMBLED STORY COMPETITION.—No. 27.

The first prize of £5 goes to Miss M. Cocks, 35, Pascoe Road, Lewisham.

Prizes of £1 each have been sent to G. Puddy, 26, Moore Lane, Clevedon, Somerset; James Matthews, "The Elms," Newbury, Berks; Charles W. Sayer, Arcade Villa, Arcade Road, Ilfracombe.

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RESULT OF POST-CARD COMPETITION No. 2.

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